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Languishing without a Human Touch: Directing In The Next Room or The Vibrator Play

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LANGUISHING WITHOUT A HUMAN TOUCH:
DIRECTING IN THE NEXT ROOM OR THE VIBRATOR PLAY

by
SARAH BELFRAGE HONERMAN

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
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Languishing Without a Human Touch: Directing *In The Next Room or the Vibrator Play*

Sarah Belfrage Honerman

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ABSTRACT


This document is a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the Masters of Fine Arts degree in Theatre Arts at Minnesota State University, Mankato. It is a detailed account of Sarah Belfrage Honerman’s directorial process for In The Next Room or the vibrator play by Sarah Ruhl. The play was produced in the Andreas Theatre and ran from September 21 to 24, 2022. The thesis outlines the director’s artistic process from pre-production through the performance in five chapters that include a early production 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 also included.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I

EARLY PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

“I would like to love you … I have not known how” (*In The Next Room* 140). In a moment of finally trying to understand his wife, Dr. Givings expresses feelings that he has been too afraid to share. In an effort to grow and allow her to express herself, Dr. Givings opens up to Catherine and creates room for them to connect. This quote in Sarah Ruhl’s play, *In The Next Room or the vibrator play*, emphasizes one of the most important themes of the show: what does it mean to love someone, and how do our many differences help or prevent us from communicating this love to one another? At its core, the play delves heavily into intimacy and the variety of ways in which men and women have differed in expressing themselves to one another, in large part due to learned behaviors in how to communicate. In particular, Ruhl focuses on the marriage of Mrs. and Dr. Givings, a couple newly endowed with a daughter and the invention of a lifetime — electricity. Despite these moments of happiness, the couple find themselves unable to connect with one another and their love is not as pronounced as it had been. Although set in the Victorian Era, the play asks today’s audiences to assess the relationships in their own lives and truly decide what it means to overcome communication barriers to fully express ourselves to those we love. In order to begin understanding how to answer these questions in relationship to the play, it is important to examine this production’s main
themes, a brief character analysis of each player, and the major design elements desired to fulfill the concept.

As a female identifying mother and wife, this play immediately hit a harmonious chord with me. After a recent diagnosis of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), I found myself both in awe of and distraught at the lack of medical information available to uterus bearing individuals. While PCOS is not at the heart of *In The Next Room*, hysteria most certainly is. Once widely diagnosed, particularly in females, hysteria became an umbrella term for almost any ailment. According to journalist Eleanor Morgan’s book, *Hysterical: Why We Need to Talk About Women, Hormones, and Mental Health*, these symptoms of hysteria included “nervousness, insomnia, bloating, shortness of breath, troublemaking, sexual desire, faintness, and irritability” (90). Rather than addressing these health concerns head on, categorizing these ailments under broad terms instead allows society to avoid and ignore them. I found myself intrigued by the importance of this umbrella term, as PCOS seems to be similar in many ways. This became a passionate exploration for me, and I knew that *In The Next Room* was a play I needed to direct.

One of the most important themes of this play is women reclaiming their sexuality and honoring their bodies for the wonderful and miraculous feats they can accomplish. In addition, it is important that these individuals connect back to their relationship with the natural world. In this case, the natural world relates directly to the relationship one establishes with elements such as water and earth, those directly connected back to our original roots before technology and societal expectations. It is through this
understanding that the characters are finally able to achieve a real sense of intimacy with those they love. In this capacity, intimacy refers to the ability for individuals in a committed romantic relationship to openly communicate their desires, passion, and love for one another on both a physical and vocal level. This was a rather radical idea in the Victorian Era, but it is still a rather cliche issue that needs to be addressed, particularly in the United States. If Americans are unable to teach their youth about necessary things like sexual education, how on earth can they be expected to understand intimacy in their future relationships? These is a clear symptom of refusing to address these concerns that we still see today.

In Amy Muse’s analysis of In The Next Room, she notes that we shy away from intimacy and opening ourselves to powerful sensations. In doing so, we make ourselves “vulnerable to the deepest pleasures, in the presence of another” which can be “hard, and risky” (Muse 84). She continues on to say “Opening yourself up to another human being, being truly intimate with another being, is one of the hardest things we will ever be called upon to do” (Muse 84). This is of vital importance, as Catherine and Dr. Givings are finally able to connect on this level in the final scene. In fact, Catherine “claims emotion, intimacy, and physicality in a way she has never been able to do before,” and “she does so in a (more) natural setting,” as she and Dr. Givings begin to make love outside in the snow (Durham 131).

Audiences should leave this show with a firm understanding that an inability to communicate our needs, desires, joys, and especially sorrows with those we love will
illicit a loneliness that cannot easily be repaired. We must, in addition, understand what happens when we ignore the people we love and misinterpret what they need from us. When we do not address our emotions with those closest to us, we delve into a dark world that is not easy to interpret. Without clarity in how intimate relationships can lead us to discovering more about ourselves, there are pieces about our lives that will remain in the dark, out of the light. This is especially true for Catherine and Dr. Givings. It is not until they finally reconnect in a physical way in the natural world that they are able to leave the confines of the era behind and shatter the standards impressed upon them. Rather than allowing the expectations of the period to restrict them, they choose to break the oppressive world and ultimately embrace one another and their love.

The relationships established in the world of *In The Next Room* offer beautiful insight not only into the world of the Victorian Era, but also into the wonderful and sometimes frustrating world of relationships established between men and women. Further specifics of the Victorian Era will be discussed in Chapter Two, but it is important to note that this period is defined by rigid expectations in how individuals interacted with one another, especially those of varying genders. Women were viewed as overly emotional people, lacking sense. In addition, they’re not viewed as individuals but as extensions of their fathers and husbands who must do as they are told, not do as they would like. At the center of this story lies Mrs. Catherine Givings, an energetic young woman, a new mother, and a thoughtful wife who longs for more time with her husband. She struggles throughout the play, particularly with wondering who she is and what she
needs to do to be “a real woman,” a “virtuous mother,” and a “good wife” to her husband. At one point, she even says, “I don’t know at all what kind of person I am” (*In The Next Room* 18).

One of Catherine’s biggest challenges is discovering who she is as a person. As a new mother, she struggles with breastfeeding. As such, Catherine and her husband hire a wet nurse, Elizabeth, to help feed their daughter, Lotty. This brings Catherine an extreme amount of pain, as she states, “Milk is comfort, milk is love. How will she learn to love me?” (*In The Next Room* 92). It is a true concern for her that her daughter will not learn to love her since they do not have that bonded feeding time, and she becomes increasingly frustrated that her daughter seems to favor Elizabeth over her. In a conversation about breastfeeding with Elizabeth, Catherine expresses that “…it is women who are eaten - who turn their bodies into food — I gave up my blood — there was so much blood — and I gave up my body — but I couldn’t feed her, could not turn my body into food, and she was so hungry. I suppose that makes me an inferior kind of women” (*In The Next Room* 47). This mentality is important to understand, as Catherine fixates on what it means to be a “real woman” — something that has specific connotations in the Victorian era in which she lived. This certainly did not exclude the idea of being a good mother by feeding her child on her own — although we know now that so many aspects can affect a mother’s ability to make milk.

Another cause for anxiety that Catherine faces is merely how to get her husband’s attention. As most married individuals, she seeks out her husband’s attention, wanting
him to bestow her with love. As a woman in the Victorian Era, Catherine is a specific
type of woman. For example, Catherine is unable to pay Elizabeth for her services,
saying “I haven’t any money, I’ll have to ask my husband” (*In The Next Room* 50). The
finances are certainly managed by the men, and always in hushed tones in the presence of
ladies. It seems that Catherine sometimes struggles with being a woman in this period, as
she is open about blurting things out rather than taking time to think and reflect before
openly speaking. This is a common theme for her, and as she discovers more about
electricity and some of her husband’s work, she even expresses a desire “… to use the
device again and unlock the mystery as to why it makes you [Mrs. Daldry] drowsy and
makes me very excitable. Why, I feel like a scientist!” (*In The Next Room* 81). In her
loneliness, Catherine seeks out the comfort of friendships in her husband’s patients,
hoping to find the right match to allow her freedom from solitude.

Catherine starts the play in turmoil. Unsure whether she is worthy to hold the title
of wife and mother, she bemoans how lonely she feels, despite having a child and
husband. Her perceived solitude, which her husband does not understand, keeps the two
of them from truly connecting in their love. At one point, Catherine describes her piano
as “languishing without a human touch,” which certainly mirrors her current marital
situation and personal state of mind (*In The Next Room* 35). She tries to confront Dr.
Givings about this, telling him, “I am not healthy. I feel restless, and excitable, and I cry
at the smallest thing. You help countless other women but me, your wife, you pat on the
head” (*In The Next Room* 92). She desperately wants to connect with her husband. She
firmly believes that if he will administer treatment on her, this will allow room for them to reconnect. When this does not seem to work, their relationship is on the brink of catastrophic collapse. Catherine begins to question everything she knows and has understood of their relationship up to this point. She attempts to plead with memories. She expresses a time when she “was nothing more than a girl I wrote my name in the snow outside your window — I would have done anything for you [Dr. Givings] to notice me” (In The Next Room 97). This is still true, as she pleads with him for attention that she continually seems to be denied. At one point in the play, Catherine develops feelings for one of Dr. Givings’ patients, a man named Leo. Dr. Givings walks in when Catherine has her hand on Leo’s face. Although taken a bit by surprise, he expresses that he is not jealous. Catherine is distraught, as she “had hoped that [he] would mind” (In The Next Room 103). After a few choice encounters, Dr. Givings finds Catherine using a vibrator alone in his office, sobbing. She begs him to tell her why he loves her — and in his own medical way, he is able to do so. She takes him into the snow and together, they make a snow angel. She has finally found what she has desired — her husband is willing to be open in his love for her. He begins understanding that the vulnerability of emotion will aid in the development of their connection to one another. Catherine is finally able to take charge and demand what she needs. In these moments, her strength is unparalleled. Arguably, this allows their relationship to change from the start of the play to the end. Rather than viewed as an extension of himself, Dr. Givings now views Catherine’s needs and desires as aspects just as important as his own.
Dr. Givings is certainly the secondary piece to the main relationship of the play. As a scientific medical man, Dr. Givings focuses primarily on the practical natures of life. Since the play takes place around the 1880s, at the dawn of electricity, he is fixated heavily on Thomas Edison’s work and how it will change and embolden the scientific community. This is especially important with his work on patients suffering from hysteria, an ailment that was all too commonly diagnosed during this period. Dr. Givings has discovered, with the use of electricity, that stimulating a woman’s clitoris can relieve hysterical symptoms by reducing congestion apparent in female patients’ wombs (In The Next Room 19). Electricity makes this work even easier for him. According to Dr. Givings, “It used to be that it would take me or it would take Annie [nurse] — oh — hours — to produce a paroxysm in our patients and it demanded quite a lot of skill and patience” (In The Next Room 19).

At first glance, it seems that Dr. Givings main concern is treating his patients. He spends most of his days either researching electricity and how to use it in his work, or by spending time eliciting paroxysms in his patients to relieve “the pent-up emotion inside the womb that causes … hysterical symptoms” (In The Next Room 22). A closer inspection reveals, however, that the biggest challenge Dr. Givings faces is finding a balance between his career and his family life. As was rather typical of the Victorian Era, Dr. Givings provides most of his attention to his patients. His dedication to his medical craft is certainly praiseworthy, but he fails to see how he can connect the two worlds together — keeping his private life and work life completely separate. In fact, he even
says “I made a terrible mistake bringing you into the operating theater. Men of science should never mix their family lives and their medical lives. It was my mistake, my darling, and we will both forget about it,” after finally allowing Catherine to experience the vibrator (In The Next Room 96).

At the start of the play, Dr. Givings is a man married to his work. In fact, he is so absorbed that he walks by his wife and into his operating theater without even saying hello to her — which he only realizes after she says “Hello” when he leaves the room. He is rooted in practicality, like most men in the Victorian Era. Rather than listening to Catherine’s emotions about not being able to breastfeed their daughter, he tells her that she must “think of the baby and what’s best for the baby. She would starve without milk, so think about that and be practical” (In The Next Room 42). He does not fixate on her emotional state, but simply dismisses it for being impractical. Despite having several conversations throughout the play about their relationship with the other characters, Dr. Givings often jumps to talking to his clients and dismissing his wife’s commentary as merely overly romantic in nature. Perhaps his most astute commentary in the play is when he tells Catherine, “I shall never understand women” (In The Next Room 91). This is clearly not only meant to be humorous, but to illicit a response of pity for someone being so oblivious to what is right in front of his face. It is not until Catherine has used his medical vibrator and tries to connect with him on an emotional and physical level that he finally starts to not only truly listen to her, but he finally recognizes that she’s falling apart. He is no longer able to see her suffer and do absolutely nothing about it. She
offers her insight — which he initially dismisses — but he begins to fixate on little pieces she shares with him. At one point, he tells a male patient, “What men do not observe because their intellect prevents them from seeing would fill many books” (*In The Next Room* 68). This is absolutely pivotal for Dr. Givings, because when he finally acknowledges his vulnerable emotions and begins to interpret them in the final scene of the play, he is able to connect with his wife at last.

Another character who certainly reflects the attitudes of the Victorian Era is Mr. Daldry. Burdened with a wife who suffers from hysteria, Mr. Daldry longs for their younger days together when his wife could easily tend to his every need. It seems now that her hysteria has made their marriage quite burdensome, leaving her husband with a rather woebegone attitude. When discussing her illness with Dr. Givings, Mr. Daldry says, “You have no idea what a source of anguish my wife’s illness has been to me. And to her, of course” (*In The Next Room* 13). As was typical of this period, Mr. Daldry is far more concerned about how his wife’s illness is impacting him than how it impacts her. It is clear that Mr. Daldry is missing physical aspects of his relationship with his wife.

When Dr. Givings and Catherine express their need for a wet nurse, Mr. Daldry is quick to suggest his housekeeper who recently lost her son. He assures the couple that she is married, arguing that “you don’t want an unmarried woman boarding at your house — turn the household upside down — the pretty ones anyway…” (*In The Next Room* 28). This lustful nature permeates his conversations. He and Catherine have several interactions and it is clear that he longs for her youthful energy. He even tells her, “It’s
good you’re done with that odious nursing business. A woman like you should be —

enjoying yourself — not shut up in a nursery all day” (*In The Next Room* 112). Although

he does not know Catherine’s internal anguish at not being able to feed her own daughter,

his insensitivity at this intimate subject is a bit alarming. Eventually he ends up making

advancements on Catherine and attempts to kiss her. After pushing him away, Mr. Daldry

once again reflects a self pitying nature, stating, “You have no idea how I long for a

woman of energy. My wife is so tired. She is so tired, all the time” (*In The Next Room*

122). Despite a slap and a tongue lashing from Catherine, Mr. Daldry does not seem to

change his opinions. He leaves as requested, but it is clear that his selfish nature has not

changed from the beginning of the play.

In stark contrast to her husband, Mrs. Daldry is rather unsure of herself. As the

first patient of Dr. Givings that the audience sees, she is disturbed by the light of the lamp

and the cold temperature. She seems rather distraught, unsure of how to handle herself

around others, finding herself cringing at the term “operating theater,” which instead

prompts Dr. Givings’ assistant Annie to say, “…let’s just call it the next room for now”

(*In The Next Room* 9). As she runs through her symptoms, she describes their marital

situation: “I am breaking his heart — He likes me to be a certain way” (*In The Next Room*

12). This is once again reflective of the Victorian Era beliefs that a woman has a certain

duty to her husband. Though she believes she is primarily to blame for their lack of

children, this eventually changes for Mrs. Daldry.
Dr. Givings gives Mrs. Daldry the diagnosis of hysteria — but with no fear — as he has a new device that will easily cure her. He eventually treats her with his electric vibrator, leaving her feeling a variety of sensations she is unable to initially understand. It is through Annie that Mrs. Daldry — Sabrina — eventually begins to comprehend some of the phenomena her body is going through. In fact, Annie ends up giving Sabrina a variety of lessons — ranging from the Ancient Greeks to electricity. The two begin to form a bond with one another and eventually kiss — only to come to the heartbreaking realization that they should never see one another again. This aspect is important, as the admiration and connection these two seem to be developing for one another bends beyond that of friendship, a rather unaccepted practice between two same sex individuals in this time. It is through Annie that Sabrina begins to find herself.

Sabrina offers a unique perspective to this play. Unlike her husband, she seems to challenge the bounds of expectations in this era by the end of the show. Although she begins as a woman suffering from hysteria, unsure how to calm her nerves and manage her expectations of having children — which does not seem to be a possibility for the Daldrys — she ends the play as a rather inquisitive individual. She no longer wants to follow the bounds of what is expected of her. Her new knowledge of her body — and her apparent interest in Annie — makes her energetic in a way that has been missing from her life. Although she is aware that she can no longer visit with Annie after their intimate kiss because of the societal expectations of the period, it is clear that she has a better
understanding that she is a sexual being. In addition, she is open to communication with others in a way that was inaccessible to her prior to her treatment with Dr. Givings.

As a thirty-three year old unmarried woman without “the patience for teaching young children,” Annie finds herself working as an assistant and mid-wife to Dr. Givings (In The Next Room 24). Although she does not speak much throughout the action of the play, Annie offers the audience insight into what it means to be different. As a woman living in the Victorian Era, there are certain expectations she must follow. She should, for example, be married and bear plenty of children. Annie, of course, does not follow this way of life. She does, however, follow the grand ideal of being seen rather than being heard. Annie never once speaks out of turn, but she is certainly always ready when called upon and able to assist in many manners. Unlike many of the other female identifying characters in the play, Annie seems to be content in her life. Challenging authority is out of Annie’s purview. When Sabrina suggests that they use the vibrator on one another, Annie’s simple response is, “I do not think the doctor would like it” (In The Next Room 124). As often expected of women, she does not want to cause turmoil.

Throughout the play, Annie seems to open up more to her emotions, but she never delves deeply enough into them to get a sense that she will make a drastic change in her life. As Sabrina plays a song on the piano, she comments on the sadness of it. She and Sabrina kiss, vowing they should not see one another again, and Annie goes home for the evening. It is clear that the Victorian Era expectations are incredibly difficult. Much like
Dr. Givings in the beginning of the play, Annie relies heavily on her intellect and suppresses her emotions to avoid the damage it would cost to be viewed as “different”.

Perhaps one of the most insightful characters of this play is Elizabeth. As the Daldry’s housemaid, she is suggested to the Givings’ as a wet nurse for their daughter. Elizabeth is quite reluctant to this idea at first, as she is not sure she wants to be reminded of her newly dead son, Henry Douglas. She agrees, however, and finds herself working at the Givings’ residence as well. The relationship she begins with Catherine seems rather strained, as Catherine envies Elizabeth’s ability to feed her child so easily and Elizabeth envies the fact that Catherine’s baby is still alive. Although she has other children, the loss of a child has caused extreme emotional turmoil for Elizabeth. She describes herself as having been religious, but no longer views herself in that light.

The conversations that Catherine and Elizabeth share are some of the most enlightening of the entire play. After both Catherine and Sabrina have tried the electric vibrator, they realize that the sensations they have felt are polar opposites, but they have clear similarities as well. Dr. Givings always describes these sensations as “paroxysms,” a term he uses in a medical sense to mean a sudden feeling or expression of a specific emotion. The women are, of course, actually experiencing orgasms. It is important to remember that Dr. Givings does not realize the vibrator is causing the women sexual pleasure — even the women do not realize this is what is occurring. The pair ask Elizabeth about these varying feelings, wondering if she has ever felt either of these types of sensations. Elizabeth’s response is that some of the sensations sound like those “that
women might have when they are having relations with their husbands” (In The Next Room 115). Catherine and Sabrina immediately laugh at this notion, believing that feeling these phenomenon with their husbands would only cause them embarrassment. This is important for several reasons, including the fact that sex was a rather “taboo” subject for the Victorian Era. In addition, it shows just how little men and women knew about the female body and how little was known about vulvar stimulation in relation to sexual gratification.

By the end of the play, Elizabeth has become a stronger, more vocal woman. In the beginning, she has understandable anger at the loss of her child and the survival of another. Through her time breastfeeding Lotty, Elizabeth comes to love her and understands the beauty of life, however short lived. After telling Catherine that she must quit as their wet nurse, Elizabeth shares how she has eventually let go of her hurt and anger: “My mother told me to pray each day since I was a little girl, to pray that you borrow everything, everyone you love, from God. That way your heart doesn’t break when you have to give your son, or your mother, or your husband, back to God” (In The Next Room 133). She has finally come to peace with the death of her son and has left her mark on the Givings household. It is through Elizabeth that Catherine begins to learn that there is more to being a person, more to being a woman, than just listening to others and following a set standard of rules.

It is important to note that Ruhl clearly depicts Elizabeth as a Black woman. This creates a conversation around the racial tensions of this period. While the other characters
are seemingly white individuals, Elizabeth is in a different world. The barriers in the late 1800s prevent an individual such as Elizabeth from opportunities that would otherwise be afforded to her. In addition, the cultural expectations are significantly different. Where a White woman may be able to assert herself, although still viewed inappropriately, it would be less problematic than if a Black woman did so. This becomes important in the end then, when Elizabeth finally asserts herself and makes bold statements. For example, in her final moments with Catherine, Elizabeth expresses her need for the Givings’ to understand what a beautiful gift their daughter is; “I hope every day you keep her — you keep her close to you — and you remember the blood that her milk was made from. The blood of my son, my Henry” (Ruhl 134). In doing this, Elizabeth demands recognition not only of what she has done for the Givings family, but also for the loss of her own son.

Among the most eccentric of characters, especially for the Victorian Era, is Dr. Givings sole male patient, Leo Irving. As an artist, Leo has found himself in a rather great state of mental turmoil after the love of his life left him. He not only is unable to move on from her, but he is also unable to paint and create his artwork. Although rather rare, Dr. Givings decides to take him on as a patient, stating that Leo is suffering from hysteria and could benefit from the use of the Chattanooga vibrator. Because the male anatomy is most assuredly not the same as the female anatomy, this vibrator is used in the anal cavity. After his first session, Leo already feels on the mend and ready to paint. He finds that he is most assuredly ready to find love in others and create it in his work.
Leo’s eccentric nature does not go unnoted by Catherine. She finds herself fascinated with him, living to hear every word that he wants to impart. As they get acquainted, Catherine finds Leo to be rather old fashioned, especially when he kisses her hand in greeting. Leo calmly responds: “I’m afraid everyone goes around these days saying: I am a modern man, I am a modern woman, it’s the modern age after all. But I detest modernity” (In The Next Room 76). This is particularly alluring to Catherine and she finds herself wanting to spend time with Leo. At one point, she even places her hand on his face. This rather intimate gesture seems to mean much more to Catherine than it does to Leo, however, as he finds himself taken by Elizabeth’s beauty. He wants to pay Elizabeth to paint her while breastfeeding the baby, which ultimately leads to him falling in love with her. In fact, Leo says that his treatments have made him see beauty in everyone (In The Next Room 86). Leo describes himself as being “an artist, but I am also a gentlemen” (In The Next Room 100). This holds true when he tells Catherine he must go to France and she begs to go with him. He knows that deep down, she loves her husband. In the end, Leo has evolved from a desperate, depressed artist into someone who wants the world to find love. His major change is in recognizing that you cannot always get what you want, or rather, what you think you want. He realizes that sometimes what we think we want is not what will ultimately make us happy, or even what is right for us.

Every theatrical production has many moving parts, and this show is no exception. As such, there are several individuals that will collaborate with me on this
project. The scenic design is by John Paul, costume design by Parker Adams, lighting design by Aria Smith, technical direction by Delia Stoeckel, sound design by Finley Alexander, and stage management by Glo Toupence. John Paul will also serve as Technical Advisor for the production and Vladimir Rovinsky will serve as Directing Advisor. The production will be produced by Minnesota State University, Mankato’s Department of Theater and Dance on September 21-24, 2022. As a collaborative effort, it is vital that the team follow one vision that leads us all to the same end goal: in this case, that is recognizing that even when we fill our lives with “stuff” to fill the voids, it is not until we evaluate our own emotions that we can truly find freedom in our relationships and with ourselves.

Sarah Ruhl has stated that she was “thinking of [Anton] Chekhov and [Henrik] Ibsen and the notion of the nineteenth-century interior; both the interiors of rooms and the interior of personhood and femininity” (Muse 81). As such, I think a specific emphasis on the emotions of each of the characters is vital for our production. The connections these character eventually develop in the play are important not only to them, but are also influential to those around them, including the audience. Sometimes considered haunting, Chekhov’s works can be influential here. Tapping into the idea of compartmentalized rooms, we can create a real world while fixating on the fact that something is missing, without honing in on it immediately.

The set should reflect the idea of clutter without needing to create a fully realized set. Although the Givings have more than enough material possessions in their life, it is
apparent that their marriage is empty in many ways. For Catherine especially, it is clear that something is desperately missing from her life. It is important that we create separate rooms, after all, the title of the play is *In The Next Room*. The separation between Dr. Givings’ home life and work life needs to be distinct and clear, while still allowing the audience to see everything happening in both rooms. The play often has conversations occurring simultaneously in the separate rooms, so this must be considered in construction.

In terms of costume design, there are many elaborate and intricate details that will need to be addressed. For example, this play has several characters “down to their knickers,” as Dr. Givings has his patients strip down to their undergarments in order to provide treatment. Because this play is set in the 1880s, the undergarments will have a very specific look, and it will be necessary to make sure that each piece is found and will accurately fit the actors. In addition, it is important that the clothing reflects the Victorian Era. Since this play will be realistic in nature, the costumes must reflect that choice. Their accuracy will assist in creating the realness of the world. One challenge I would pose to Adams is finding a way to connect each of the characters together. Relationships are one of the most important pieces of this play, and connecting those characters through their costumes will be an added touch of beauty.

The lighting and sound design are a bit more open to interpretation. With that said, the fact that electricity is a newer invention in the 1880s means there will be more to play with in terms of utilizing practical lights and candles. The unexpected black out in
the middle of a session for Mrs. Daldry will allow for Smith to play with lighting not only with electric instruments, but also with real flames. There is no big change in the location, as the whole play occurs at the Givings’ house, but at the end of the play, the married couple go outside in the middle of the night. This will give an opportunity for Smith to play with varying times of day in addition to the natural versus electric light. Additionally, the lighting can help establish the more emotional or more comedic moments by providing differing warm or cool looks.

The sound design of the play will also focus on the new element of electricity. This will be especially important with the different vibrators the doctor will use in his operating theater. The piano in Catherine’s living room is also important, as Mrs. Daldry plays frequently for her. If possible, the team will work to find a real piano and actors who are able to play it. However, should either of these options be inaccessible, Alexander will be ready to find songs of the era. In addition, Ruhl has a rather musical dialogue. I want to challenge Alexander to find moments of underscoring that will enhance this aspect.

Through the combined design elements, the play should focus on the importance of intimacy and evaluating emotions in order to deeply connect with those that we love. Ruhl is clearly focusing on important thoughts that needed processing in the Victorian Era, but that still need assessing today. While Ruhl does not provide any distinct answers to the big questions that are being asked about femininity, marriage, and sexuality, she does focus on the individual’s journey to understanding. This must be not only a
discernment of others, but it requires us to access our own emotions and begin comprehending and sharing them. Ultimately, my hope is for the audience to understand that it is acceptable to find beauty in the ordinary, but to also recognize that each of us deserve the extraordinary, from others and from ourselves.
CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

History favors the victor, which means many American stories and history lessons reflect a primarily straight white male lens. This is a problematic situation, but playwrights like Sarah Ruhl aim to use their craft to amend these concerning teachings. Ruhl’s 2009 play, *In The Next Room or the vibrator play*, specifically set out to evaluate intimacy and where misunderstandings of our own bodies can lead to fractions in our relationships. In addition, the play attempts to determine how differences in the gender binary affect how we communicate and react towards others, including addressing our sexuality and sexual impulses. This is especially relevant in the late 1800 Victorian Era in which the play is set.

Due to its prevalence in the setting of *In The Next Room*, it is vital to understand the Victorian Era. This period set strong expectations in gender relations, marriages, and how people viewed sex, many of which are still applicable today. In her text *Daily Life in Victorian England*, Professor Sally Mitchell brilliantly describes the expectations of the period. In regards to gender expectations, Mitchell notes that:

A gentleman was courteous, considerate, and socially at ease. He behaved honorably toward all women. He paid his gambling debts and kept his word — a verbal promise was more important than a handshake, and a
written contract seemed faintly disreputable, as if it suggested that a
gentleman’s word could not be trusted. A gentleman had to accept and
exercise leadership. He lived up to his own standards … he was honorable,
dependable, and ethical. (271)

For a man to be taken seriously, his word was of utmost importance. In addition, it was
pivotal that he focused on providing for his family. Those in the middle-class often
worked long hours that kept them away from their homes. As such, “mothers were made
responsible for moral and spiritual guidance, as well as for supervising all the
household’s practical affairs. Father was typically distant and reserved” (Mitchell 143).
This is clearly established in the Givings’ home, with Catherine tending to their daughter
while Dr. Givings works out of his home operating theater. He is distant from his wife,
which is evident from the very first scene when he walks right past her without saying
hello (In The Next Room 7-8). Distracted by his work, Dr. Givings is frequently unable to
tend to his wife’s needs for attention and connection from him.

Mitchell also comments on the “concept of disinterestedness” typical of men in
the Victorian Era (270). Ruhl once again captures this essence beautifully in Dr. Givings,
who at one point states “What men do not observe because their intellect prevents them
from seeing would fill many books” (In The Next Room 68). Although Dr. Givings is able
to see this in his male patient Leo, he is unable to notice it in himself. This
disinterestedness conjoined with a heavy focus on providing for their families and
keeping themselves busy is part of what actually kept them from connecting with others
on a more intimate level. It was the male’s role to provide monetarily for his family, and
his wife was not privy to the details of their financial status. Unfortunately, this typical
lack of connection was a foundation of the Victorian Era, especially for those in the
middle-class, such as the Givings family:

Ideologically, the middle-class home and family represented the essence of
morality, stability, and comfort. The husband had legal and economic
control over his wife, children, and servants. The family depended on his
income: the wife did not bring in money through labor (as in the working
class) or have a private settlement (as among gentry and aristocrats).

(Mitchell 142)

This economic control is clear in the Givings’ homestead. Catherine is unable to pay her
wet nurse, stating “I haven’t any money. I’ll have to ask my husband” (In The Next Room
50). This is also clear when Mr. Daldry and Dr. Givings try to settle the medical bill for
Mrs. Daldry’s treatments: “Mr. Daldry (In lowered tones, away from the ladies): Oh —
how much do I owe you, Doctor?” (In The Next Room 30). Rather than allowing their
wives to be privy to the financial burdens — or gains — they prefer instead to keep that
separate from them.

The standards for women were focused heavily on marriage, caring for children,
and displaying moral, Christian values. In fact, “the pure woman’s life was supposed to
be entirely centered on the home. She preserved the higher moral values, guarded her
husband’s conscience, guided her children’s training, and helped regenerate society
through her daily display of Christianity in action” (Mitchell 266). Women were viewed as sensitive, emotional creatures who lacked the more sensical nature needed to make executive decisions around the home. As such, “women had to be kept safe at home; their perfect compliance, obedience, innocence, and refinement would make them too easily victimized in the competitive public world” (Mitchell 267). Marriage allowed a woman the necessary support to protect her from the outside world while allowing her to meet her expected role and continue generating a population.

Although marriage was a necessary and idealized relationship in the Victorian Era, the relationship was typically built out of a sense of obligation rather than intimacy. Courtship was highly relevant and expected in all relationships. Private conversations were minimal between couples, and when they did occur, they were “brief, and usually in the open air” (Mitchell 155). As such, relationships did not have the opportunity to develop in a private nature. This paints a unique picture of the relationships throughout *In The Next Room*. Mr. and Mrs. Daldry emphasize this idea quite clearly. As was rather typical of this period, Mr. Daldry is upwards of twenty years older than his wife. While this does not mean that love cannot develop over time, it does mean there is a difference in expectations. In addition, intimacy of the period did not exist in the way we know it today. In this time, “the sexual act was associated by many wives only with a duty and by most husbands with a necessary if pleasurable yielding to one’s based nature: by few, therefore, with an innocent and joyful experience” (Houghton 353). As such, women did not necessarily find the experience gratifying. It must also be noted that men were to
“consider nice women … more like angels than human beings - an image wonderfully calculated not only to dissociate love from sex, but to turn love into worship, and worship of purity” (Houghton 355). This furthers the idea that sex is done as a duty and a means to procreate.

These ideals are exemplified in Mr. and Mrs. Daldry’s relationship. Upon discussing their husbands, Mrs. Daldry reveals to Catherine that Mr. Daldry “is very considerate - when he comes to my room at night, I am asleep - he tells me to keep my eyes shut, and I do - so I feel only the darkness - and then the pain - I lie very still - I do not see his face” (In The Next Room 116). The connection these married couples have does not seem to be based in connection in love, but rather it is based in a practicality. Marriage allows for a virtuous means to procreate, but love is an emotion that did not take priority. This is what makes Catherine’s desire to connect with her husband on a deeper level so unique. Rather than settling for a marriage based on transactional purposes, she yearns to change the standards and create a truly loving relationship with Dr. Givings. In finding her strength and demanding he speak to her, he finally reveals that he wants to love her the way she would like, but he is not sure how to do so.

The expectations of the period also revolved around heterosexual relationships. In his book Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century, Graham Robb expresses the importance of avoiding being labeled as homosexual. While the world has changed in its view of these connections, it is still a fear that many experience. Historically, “sodomy was punishable by death in England and Wales until 1861” (Robb
This suggests that countless people lived lives full of fear. In fact, Robb argues “the official and social homophobia of the 20th Century was a continuation of a Victorian trend rather than something peculiarly modern” (Robb 17). Perhaps what is more disheartening is that doctors would tell young male patients to “get married and don’t worry. You’ll soon see that it’s all in your imagination” (Robb 74). The mainstream culture did not want to recognize these relationships and feelings towards same sex couples. This is relevant to *In The Next Room*, as the idea of homosexuality is explored between Mrs. Daldry and Annie. Although both women clearly sense a connection beyond friendship with one another, neither is sure how to address those emotions. After learning about one another’s lives and developing a shared interest in music, the women ultimately kiss. The shock of these emotions becomes too much for Mrs. Daldry to handle, and she tells Annie, “I had better not see you ever again” (*In The Next Room* 130). The constraints of the period become too much and both women agree to leave their emotional pull toward one another alone.

Although *In The Next Room* may be set in the late 1800s, there are clearly relevant themes that still apply today. Even as the play was produced in 2009, reviews were mixed, showing the lack of understanding the play by some audience members. Charles McNulty of the *Los Angeles Times* thought the play had elements of humor, but argued “the problem facing the playwright [Ruhl] is how to move all this rich material forward without resorting to the bullying masculine contrivances of plot” (“Theater Review: This Dr. Feelgood has ‘em buzzing; Sarah Ruhl’s ‘In the Next Room’ is a rule-
busting pleasure, even if it does end clumsily”). McNulty seems to miss the more nuanced moments and argues that Ruhl takes a turn for the commercial and leaving her plot points behind. In doing so, he fails to recognize the beauty with which Ruhl has crafted the _In The Next Room_ world. His argument that the snowfall at the end is trite and cliche ignores the intimacy of connecting love with our natural world.

In a similar fashion, _The New York Times_’ Charles Isherwood received the production with a mixture of emotions. Although he felt Ruhl maintained her use of impressionism and symbolism, he believed the second act had “some structural infelicities” (“A Quaint Treatment for Women Wronged: [Review]). In particular, Isherwood argued that Ruhl was attempting to address too many issues in a short amount of time, which ultimately “becomes clotted in the unraveling” (“A Quaint Treatment for Women Wronged: [Review]). Is it that Ruhl attempted to add too many ideas into the second act, or is it merely that we should take away that love affects us all on a deeply intimate level? By all accounts, our varying relationships drastically affect how we understand intimacy and its place in our lives.

In a review for the _Theatre Journal_ published by Johns Hopkins University Press, Heidi Schmidt notes more of the details included in Ruhl’s work. Perhaps one of the most important aspects is the “fairly realistic style” that “incorporates some elements of Brechtian staging that subvert our expectations that nudity in performance is a particularly female condition” (“In the Next Room, or the Vibrator Play (review)”). Her review continues to elaborate on the expectations of nudity within the societal
expectations. It is often women depicted in heterosexual relationships who are expected to strip off their clothing in the art industry. It is rather rare that her male counterpart is expected to strip if she is not, and she is often expected to share more for her art than he will be. In this area then, Ruhl becomes rather innovative. The final moments with Dr. Givings becoming nude and Catherine remaining with clothing on completely shift the expectations of the Victorian world, and even to a degree, the world we live in today. Catherine now has a power she lacked previously, allowing her to speak freely and rather than ask for what she needs, reach out and take it.

These reviews seem to speak from the two gendered expectations of our world, and this illuminates one of the larger issues depicted in Ruhl’s work: hysteria and female bodies. In order to understand the connection of hysteria to *In the Next Room*, it is important to acknowledge the origin of the term. In her novel *Hysterical: Why We Need to Talk About Women, Hormones, and Mental Health*, Eleanor Morgan notes that the word hysteria originates from the Greek word “hystera,” which means “womb”. Morgan goes on to express:

Hippocrates was one of the first to identify this business of the wandering womb and believed that hysteria, a catchall term for most female illnesses and emotional excesses, anything from a headache to an epileptic fit to using a swear word, was a result of the womb actually detaching from the pelvic cavity and traveling around the body (91).
The listed examples clearly depict the problematic nature of diagnosing someone with hysteria. When symptoms can varying so drastically, from an epileptic episode to swearing, it is a wonder that not every individual carrying a womb was diagnosed at one point or another. Although hysteria evolved over time, it did not change all that quickly.

Andrew Scull furthers the definition in his novel, *Hysteria: The Biography*,

Hysteria is a pathological condition with a fascinating and tortuous medical and cultural history. If the malady seems to change its shape and its form over the centuries, who can be surprised? For here is a disorder that even those who insist on its reality concede is a chameleon-like disease that can mimic the symptoms of any other, and one that somehow seems to mold itself to the culture in which it appears. (6)

The idea that hysteria became an “umbrella term” doctors used for a variety of typically “female concerns” is alarming. It begins to illuminate a societal disparity amongst men and women. The idea that Victorian society believed women were more emotional creatures and “inherently more vulnerable to illness and disease — particularly hysteria, the basis for a diagnosis of insanity” leads to an understanding of mental distress amongst them (Morgan 115). We must also recognize that hysteria was not linked to sexuality in any means. In fact, “Women in the Victorian era were not supposed to feel sexual desire. Or, if they were, only when a man’s penis was inside them” (Morgan 119). *In The Next Room* tackles these expectations head on, with Dr. Givings provided the suggested pelvic
massage while not registering it as a sexual act. The two are completely removed from one another in his mind.

The means to which doctors attempted to cure hysteria became truly horrific. Although Dr. Givings stops at vulvar massage in the world of the play, the reality of the situation is far more bleak. Dr. R. Maurice Bucke, who was the superintendent at The London Asylum for the Insane in Canada in 1870, for example, adopted the practice of hysterectomies “because he believed that removing a woman’s harrowed womb would restore her sanity” (Morgan 116). Another doctor, English gynecologist and obstetrical surgeon Isaac Baker Brown, would perform clitoridectomies (Morgan 117). Although this practice was used for a short period of time, is was once viewed as an acceptable treatment for hysteria. In addition, some treatments included “filling the vagina with water and ice or applying leeches to the labia so they could bite and suck the life from our most vascular, tender parts. The wounds would seep for hours. Days” (Morgan 118). The horrific approaches to curing hysteria allowed a disconnect between individuals. Patients, particularly females, could no longer trust expressing what was happening to them for fear of how their symptoms would be treated. It is only through the coaxing of her husband, for example, that Mrs. Daldry ends up a patient of Dr. Givings’.

The disconnect between patients and doctors does not end here. Ruhl’s play is absolutely vital to the world today, where doctors still take the word of women less seriously than men. Elinor Cleghorn’s novel, *Unwell Women: Misdiagnosis and Myth in a Man-Made World*, is a beautiful depiction of this ever present issue. Throughout the text,
Cleghorn journeys through her own personal struggles as a woman with suffering health, but she beautifully chronicles the journey of the medical understanding of human anatomy. In addition to relaying these growths, she is able to uncover some rather startling discoveries as well:

Shockingly, the clitoris has been misrepresented, suppressed, and even completely omitted from anatomical and gynecological literature until very recently. It was only in 2005 that Professor Helen O’Connell, Australia’s first female urologist, revealed that the glans makes up only about a fifth of this wishbone-shaped organ that extends its legs, or crura, into the tissue of the vulva. (51-52)

If women are unable to understand their own bodies, it is no wonder that there is a delineation between doctors and patients. This is clearly seen in Ruhl’s script, with Leo, Mrs. Daldry, and Catherine not understanding what is happening to their bodies when they receive treatment. Although audiences may understand today that these characters are experiencing orgasms, it is clear that the characters are unaware of what this sensation truly is. This creates tension for each of them in a variety of ways, as they seemingly start to feel better but are unable to put words to what their bodies are communicating to them.

It is also important to acknowledge current events such as the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) overturning the 1973 Roe v. Wade and 1992 Planned Parenthood v. Casey decisions on June 24, 2022. In doing so, SCOTUS declared “The Constitution does not confer a right to abortion; Roe and Casey are overruled; and the
authority to regulate abortion is returned to the people and their elected representatives” (Kaplan). Thirteen states, including Arkansas, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming implemented “trigger bans” that went into effect because of the decision. In doing so, these states immediately put limits on abortion access to state residents, some going so far as to completely ban the procedure. This is detrimental to health care access, as abortion is used in instances that go beyond the stereotypical “I don’t want to have a baby” argument. Instances of miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, or preeclampsia require medical professionals to intervene immediately. In overturning these decisions, SCOTUS has effectively allowed the states to keep health care from many who desperately need it.

An inability to understand this detrimental backtrack is exactly why we must continue to fight and discuss healthcare for uterus bearing individuals.

The societal expectations set in America on individuals who are not straight, white, and male are still problematic in 2023. While the world has evolved from the late 1880s, there are far too many aspects that remain unchanged. A distrust of individuals understanding their own bodies is absolutely among these areas. Even today, being described as hysterical has negative connotations that can prevent an individual from functioning well in society. Fitting into a mold is far from necessary, but shame is still thrown on those who do not remain in their prescribed roles. Those who do not want to become mothers should not be forced into that position; desiring sex should be a natural, beautiful connection; making choices outside the normal expectations should be
celebrated. *In The Next Room* allows for a world where individuals can seek, demand, and encourage one another to communicate, explore, and fall in love with the world and people around them.
April 22, 2022

Today marked our first production meeting for Sarah Ruhl’s *In The Next Room or the vibrator play*. In attendance were Scenic Designer and Technical Advisor John Paul, Costume Designer Parker Adams, Lighting Designer Aria Smith, Sound Designer Finley Alexander, Technical Director Delia Stoeckel, Production Stage Manager Glo Toupence, and Directing Advisor Vladimir Rovinsky. I wanted to use this meeting primarily to share the larger conceptual ideas for the production to allow designers the opportunity to begin their research. The first show slot in the year provides many challenges and opportunities for growth, especially considering the summer break that falls while Minnesota State University, Mankato is on hiatus from regular classes and events. This means we will have three production meetings before we leave until August, a gap of nearly three months.

In particular, I wanted to communicate to the team the necessity of authenticity for our production. It is easy to fall into the traps of comedic representations of orgasms for this show, but I do not want our production to go that route. I believe that Ruhl’s intention for this show is one of utmost sincerity, looking at Dr. Givings’ work with hysteria not through a knock-out laughing comedic tone, but through one of bitter reality. For most people, the relatability does not fall in experiencing the idea of Victorian
“hysteria,” but rather in the idea of Ruhl’s more finite point: What does it truly mean to love someone?

I also shared a few pieces of music with the team, including a piece titled Chaotic Calm by Waterflame. I loved the essence of technological tones that played throughout this piece, but I also particularly enjoyed the pace. So many things are happening in this song and I think it perfectly encapsulates the rhythm of this show. Without any one single piece, it would drastically change the whole.

The team was incredibly receptive to the ideas and I look forward to seeing what they bring to the table next week. I have asked that they do some initial research of the period and bring their first thoughts to the table.

April 29, 2022

I am filled with excitement as the designers begin to fuel their creative processes. Today’s discussion allowed the designers to ask a variety of questions that I think will help guide decisions from here. Some of these questions that I need to consider are the use of practical lighting. There is a mention of an electrical lamp and candles. We know that we will need at least one practical lamp, but Smith posed the question of whether there would be more than that. In addition, she wondered if we wanted to use real flames or battery operated flames for the candles. I am leaning towards real flames, but we first need to check in with Stoeckel’s advisor, George Grubb, on whether this is possible or not. She offered to ask and let us know at our next meeting.
Paul showed several images of homes in the Victorian era. This included many that contained a lot of clutter. Some even had pictures that were not hung on the wall but instead leaning against the wall because there was not enough room left to display them. I loved this aspect of the era. I told Paul that I loved the idea of clutter and wondered how we could create that with our budget. I also mentioned that Mrs. Givings feels empty in so many ways and hoped there was a possibility to not only create the cluttered business, but also to create a sense of that emptiness as well. Paul has some ideas that involve using the rigging to hang moulding rather than creating actual walls. I love this idea and look forward to what he comes up with in our next meetings.

Some of the other questions posed this meeting were how we want to handle the piano, what elements of the Victorian era are absolutely necessary, and how do we want to represent the next room. My initial thoughts are to go with a real piano, hoping that I can cast some actors who will be able to play it. I think this will offer an authenticity to the production. I also believe that the “stuff” of the Victorian era is important, particularly the furniture. This is something for us to consider, as the era dictates clutter and we have both limited time and a limited budget. I think the question about representation of the next room is very important. I do not currently have a definitive answer on that, but I do know that it should guide many of our decisions. This room is all important because it is how and where Dr. Givings inadvertently closes himself off from his wife, Mrs. Givings. It is the barrier that causes many of the uncertain feelings Mrs. Givings has about herself and her marriage. It is, ultimately, an important key of this show.
For next week’s meeting, the production team will start their initial designs. After today’s conversation, I cannot wait to see what they each come up with.

May 6, 2022

Today’s meeting was meaningful for so many reasons. We are moving forward with the design process and I love seeing what the designers come up with. Adams was unable to attend today’s meeting, but she sent a few initial sketches ahead of time so they could be shared with the production team. One concern Adams and her advisor, David McCarl, shared was that there are not many dresses in our stock that fit the 1880’s period. They asked about the possibility of instead setting the play in the 1890’s, as it would give us triple the amount of women’s wear to work with, especially because we are on a time and money constraint. Adams argued that the main thing that would then change on the costume designs would be the lack of a bustle. I did not have a problem with this, and asked how the other designers felt about it. With no objections, we decided to move forward with the slight time change.

Paul shared an initial set design that I was absolutely in love with, as he expertly took the idea of filling the space with emptiness. The initial design has several picture frames hanging from a picture rail that hangs off the rigging. In addition, there is a beautiful crown molding piece that hangs off the rigging as well. I loved that Paul really took the ideas from our last meeting and encapsulated them. We discussed the necessity of clutter in the Victorian era, but we are also dealing with both a budget and time
constraint with this show. Since we are in the studio, it is necessary that we stick with a
tightened budget. In addition, we are the first show of the school year, leaving us roughly
two and a half weeks to get everything in place for the actors to get used to using before
we open. I think Paul’s design is a perfect mixture of addressing these concerns while
also being true to the jumbled and busy nature of the Victorian period.

Stoeckel followed up with us after her meeting with her advisor George Grubb. It
sounds like having open flames for the show will be feasible with some considerations,
such as having an assistant stage manager with a fire extinguisher ready to go in case
something were to happen. This individual will need to be trained in how to use the
extinguisher. In addition, any flames that will be used need to be in the middle of any
place it may be set down or held by an actor. I think these are aspects that can absolutely
be handled, and I would like to pursue the use of candles. Stoeckel also mentioned that
Grubb said rigging was possible, but it would certainly depend on what was being hung
and how heavy it is. These are aspects to keep in mind as we move forward.

Alexander played a few sound clips for us today, focusing on the vibrating clips. I
think she is on the right track, as she wants to have differing hums of electricity
throughout the show. I appreciate that she is taking vibrating clips and changing their
tones and frequencies so that they sound similar but not exactly the same. I have no doubt
that her design will be a wonderful contribution to this show and I cannot wait to see
what else she develops over the summer.
Smith did not have much to share today, which is fairly typical for a lighting designer until we have a ground plan to play with. She did ask about the window placement since we will not have an actual window on stage. I thought this was a good question to ask, especially because she is hoping to use the idea of a window to establish different times of the day. Much like Alexander’s design, I am excited to see what Smith creates throughout the process.

Since we have reached the end of the semester, we are done with weekly meetings for the time being. This makes me a little nervous, but I know that I have a strong team for this production. We are planning to try and meet a couple of times over the summer to check in with one another. In the event that people are unable to attend a meeting, they will have access to our Microsoft TEAMS folder for the show and can upload designs and thoughts there. This will allow us to continue our work on the show, despite going away until August. I am looking forward to seeing where things go from here.

July 11, 2022

With the exception of Directing Advisor Rovinsky, the team was able to meet today and discuss how designs have progressed over the summer. Paul started the meeting by sharing photos of his model and a ground plan. He had previously emailed these items to the team, but shared them so we could look at them while simultaneously discussing. I was glad that Paul explained the ground plan in relation to the photos he shared, because I was originally concerned that the audience members sitting house left
would be unable to see what was occurring in the doctor’s procedural room. Fortunately, it does not seem like this will be a problem. Paul posed a few questions that I need to consider, including whether or not we should remove the seating on the ground floor. This would eliminate around twenty seats but would still leave us with 230. It would allow for a bit more room on the floor and possibly allay some fears of sightline problems.

I also prompted Paul with a few questions of my own. Currently, I am concerned about the placement of the piano. It sits in an area that I believe may be obstructed for certain audience members. Because the piano is instrumental for some moments of intimacy, a rather important concept in this play, I want to make sure it is visible to all. He agreed that we should be able to rearrange some of the furniture, as he is not married to the current placement of anything. I was glad to hear that and look forward to the solution he finds to give more prominence to the piano.

Another question I had was about the use of snow. This seems to be an important piece of the script, especially because Mrs. Givings originally wrote her name in the snow outside of Dr. Givings’ window to catch his attention. As they undress each other outside, I think snow falling would be a wonderful connective piece as they rekindle their love and rediscover one another. Paul says that this may be a little tricky in the Andreas Theatre, but it has been done before and he is in support of making it happen.

Smith had a few concerns about the set in relation to her lighting design. Her first concern was with the open slat nature of the door. She argued that if we ever want to
isolate one of the rooms and have the other completely dark, light will inevitably spill over into the other room through the holes. In addition, Smith was concerned with the hanging molding that separates the two rooms, as it may cause shadows to fall when she creates face lighting from one room to the next. Paul and I understood the questions and I believe allayed any fears Smith held. Paul said he would be happy to look at cutting back the hanging moulding in order to prevent any shadow. I asked Smith if she had any areas where she wanted to isolate one room from the other, as I had not read the script in that way. She agreed, but also said she wanted to make sure we were able to discuss it so we were both on the same page. The last question Smith had was in regard to how many practicals we want to use. I believe we settled on two or three in the main living area and one in the doctor’s procedural room.

Adams had some new costume sketches to share — one for Mr. Daldry and one for Leo. I love what she is doing to individualize these characters. I think she has a good understanding of each of the characters and their singular essence. Adams did share her concern with having the correct undergarments for the show. She shared that her advisor McCarl was unsure on whether or not we have them in stock or will need to order them. Adams also noted that this will likely be the area where she may need to spend some money. She also wondered how I wanted to handle the end of the show in terms of clothing. I expressed a desire to have Mrs. Givings in a state of undress, although not completely nude. I did argue, however, that Dr. Givings should be nude. I think it would be appropriate for the actor to wear a piece to cover his front, but that we should be able
to see his bare rear end. I think this is important because Mrs. Givings needs to straddle Dr. Givings in the end. Something along the lines of a genital guard would add room for a barrier between the two actors. Adams also wanted to be sure the audition notice included all of the nudity and the actors who will be down to their underwear. I said I would double check, but that I was pretty positive all of those items had been addressed.

As we left the meeting, I promised Paul that I would look through the play this week and get him a prop list. We are looking at meeting again in August before school starts. In addition, I asked the production team to bring a rough budget number to the next meeting. This way, we can all be conscious of what other designers need. I left this meeting feeling quite excited to come back to school and really dig into this production.

August 12, 2022

After a month apart, it was nice to have another meeting today. We had almost the whole team, although Rovinsky and Adams were missing. This did not pose too many problems, although we are left without a proposed budgetary number for the costumes and that does make me a little nervous. I have asked stage manager Toupence to follow up with Adams to get this information.

Today we started with a conversation around the set. After reading the play again, I realized that our set design did not allow for an exit to the baby’s nursery. I wanted to brainstorm possible options with Paul. We did not finalize anything during the meeting, but Paul brought up a few options and said he would play with the design to limit any
major changes that would affect Smith’s light plot. We also discussed removing the first row of chairs from the audience again. I followed up with the department’s Managing Director, Matthew Caron, to see if this was a possibility. It sounds like this should not be a problem and will offer the actors and the audience more room. As discussed in our last meeting, Paul shortened the cornice to allow for less shadows in Smith’s lighting design.

Technical Director Stoeckel briefed us on her meeting with her advisor Grubb. It sounds like we have plenty of the platforms in stock that we will need, but we may end up having to fight for these platforms over the mainstage musical that will be performing immediately after our show. That said, it sounds like the frames Paul and I would like to use for the show are not plentiful in stock and we will need to find options to either purchase or make our own. Stoeckel has requested $350 for the set budget, which seems to make sense with what we have and what we will need to either purchase or build.

Alexander is moving along well with the sound design. She had updated a couple of sound clips that I will review. So far, she has been able to collect a variety of baby cries and doorbells. I look forward to seeing what she has found and providing her with some feedback. Alexander does not think we will need to spend much money on the sound design, so she has requested $30 in order to make sure there is some wiggle room.

Smith shared a rough light plot with the team today. After talking to her advisor, Steve Smith, she believes that the light hang can occur as early as the second day of classes, Tuesday, August 23. She discussed the use of gobos for windows in order to use lighting to indicate the time of day throughout the production. In terms of a budgetary
stance, Smith also did not feel like she would need to purchase much. In order to leave some wiggle room, she has requested $50. Again, this seems quite reasonable.

We have agreed that we can wait to meet until the first week of classes to meet again. This will be sometime during the week of August 22, but we will not know until the theatre faculty have their first meetings to determine the date. I have asked Paul if Thursday or Friday might be possible because of my schedule. The process is starting to feel more real now that we are so close to auditions and starting to build the show.

**August 22, 2022**

Audition day finally arrived. Faculty member Heather Hamilton and I held auditions in the Andreas Theatre, mine being for Sarah Ruhl’s *In The Next Room or the vibrator play* and hers being for William Shakespeare’s *Richard III*. We had around thirty-five actors audition for us. Some individuals were strictly auditioning for Hamilton’s show, especially those required to do so for department standard expectations. To my surprise, I also had some individuals who strictly auditioned for me. I found this surprising for a couple of reasons, including the fact that the show involves a great deal of intimate moments and the fact that it is a studio production. This is not always true, but it has been my experience that some individuals do not want to audition for the studio productions because they are not as “prestigious” as the main stage season shows. Either way, I was delighted to have such a strong presence of interest in our *In The Next Room* production.
Actors interested in auditioning for *In The Next Room* were asked to prepare a thirty second monologue written by Sarah Ruhl or a playwright with a similar style. I came into auditions excited, knowing that I had two roles that needed strong performers, several roles that needed actors with specific intimacy expectations, and a bit more flexibility on some of the other roles. The roles that I knew needed strong performers were Mrs. and Dr. Givings. It is vital that Dr. Givings has a maturity to him as well as an understanding of playing a man that truly fits the era. He must understand what it is to love someone but also must understand the standards of the time in which he lives. Catherine is the star of the show and as such, exemplifies the central theme of the play: overcoming a tortured loneliness and finding love in others and herself. Both roles require actors with strong skill sets. While the other roles come with their own struggles, I believe they would be a bit easier to guide younger performers through if the need should arise.

I was interested to see what shows students would select. I was pleasantly surprised to see monologues that ranged from Sarah Ruhl’s plays *Eurydice*, *How to Transcend a Happy Marriage*, *Melancholy Play*, and *The Clean House*. I had anticipated several monologues from *In The Next Room*, but only saw two. I actually really appreciated that, as I felt it allowed me to focus on the actor’s abilities to perform the poetic language rather than immediately putting them into a role based on what they performed. The quality of auditions ranged from actors who clearly had ample experience to those that seemed a bit timid and new.
In addition to finding seven actors for *In The Next Room* and sixteen actors for *Richard III*, the school was also casting *Disney’s High School Musical*, which required forty individuals. Given these needs, I knew it was important that I not rely only on my first thoughts for each character. Given that, I ended up drafting a list with a first, second, and third choice for each character. The only character that I did not list a second and third choice for was Dr. Givings. I truthfully felt that Seth M. Honerman’s audition was the most moving and mature, and I firmly believed he was the only actor who could handle the complexities of this character.

After spending nearly an hour working on casting decisions, Hamilton and I compared notes to look for overlap. As such, there were four actors in total that were on both of our lists. We each made concessions, Hamilton asking for two actors and me doing the same. As such, we both felt confident in our lists. We then went over to the Ted Paul Theatre, knowing that the auditions for the musical may still be in progress. Indeed, the dance audition was still underway when we entered. Director Matthew Caron and musical director Nicholas Wayne were sitting in the audience, observing choreographer John Greer teach the number. Hamilton and I shared our lists with them, asking if there was anyone they desperately wanted for their casts. After a bit of back and forth, they both agreed that our lists looked good and they would remove those actors from consideration for the musical.

Deliberations did not take nearly as long as I anticipated, which left me quite relieved. In addition, I was able to cast people from either my first or second choice lists.
In the role of Dr. Givings is Honerman. I know that he has the needed maturity and versatility to attack this role. The role of Catherine Givings will be played by Natalie Suarez, who I know will counter nicely with Honerman, allowing herself to play into the high energy needed for this character while also illustrating the desperate loneliness. For the role of Annie I have cast Faith Peterson. Her ability to command a room in physicality alone is something absolutely necessary for this role. As the epitome of characters who are “seen and not heard,” it is vital that she be able to physicalize so much of the character’s inner emotions. The role of Elizabeth will be played by Lyreshia Ghostlon-Green, a strong actor who I know will tackle this beautiful role with the love and sincerity required to illustrate her deep need for connection and healing. I cast Joshua Lester in the role of Leo Irving. This eccentric Englishman must come across as different than the other characters in a sense of needing to belong but clearly not fitting the standard of the time. Lester has an impeccable English dialect and the ability to portray himself as an outsider. Mr. Daldry will be played by Chandler Rosengren. Although he is a bit more youthful than I believe is necessary for this role, I believe Rosengren can be coached to achieve the maturity of Mr. Daldry and I look forward to challenging both him and myself. Finally, Mrs. Daldry will be played by Liza Rotty. Although I am a little curious to see if I can push Rotty to find the sincerity as opposed to just the comedy, I believe she is up to the challenge of the role. Having seen her tackle dramatic roles previously, she seems to have the understanding to achieve those moments.
The audition process moved quite smoothly and I am excited to enter the rehearsal room and begin this process with this creative team. The cast varies from students in their junior year to a graduated Master of Fine Arts student, and each of these individuals brings a variety of experiences with them. As a director, I am most excited to see what they will each bring to the process and how my thoughts from the last several months of research will be changed to compliment the actors and their own thoughts of these individual characters.

August 23, 2022

I could not have asked for a better first rehearsal. After reading this script over and over again for the last several months of research and production building, it was refreshing to hear the cast read Ruhl’s poetic language. I was reassured that I made the correct choices last night in casting as we journeyed through the script together this evening. Likewise, I could already tell where I may need to push individual actors in specific moments. That is one of my favorite parts of an initial read through, as it allows you to begin assessing where to go from here.

Aside from the initial read through, I spent the evening really discussing the heart of this play with the actors. I felt it was important to share some of my research on hysteria with them, as well as sharing why I feel this play should be produced today. Although the world has made changes in how it views people since the 1880s, the sad reality is that so many aspects of human interaction are still nowhere near as equal as they
should be. It is unfortunate that human evolution in thinking has not progressed nearly as much as it probably could. For me, the fact that individuals who have a uterus still have so many unanswered questions about their anatomy is disheartening. The actors were incredibly receptive to my thoughts and seem eager to proceed on this journey. Their excitement keeps me hopeful for the work to come.

**August 24, 2022**

This evening, we began blocking Act 1, Scene 1. Both Lester and Ghostlon-Green were not called to rehearsal, but Lester decided to attend in order to work on boundary exercises. It was important to me that we spend time working on Theatrical Intimacy Education’s (TIE) boundary practice. Because this show contains so many moments of intimacy, it is vital that the actors understand their boundaries and are able to comfortably speak those boundaries to their fellow cast members. I started by explaining the guidelines of TIE’s boundary practice by referencing their text, *Staging Sex: Best Practices, Tools, and Techniques for Theatrical Intimacy*. We started by playing the game, “Simon Says,” a typically well known childhood game where participants only do something if “Simon” first says “Simon Says.” If “Simon” does not say “Simon Says” and an individual completes the activity, they are out of the game. After playing the game with the standard rules, TIE suggests allowing participants to say “No,” even when “Simon says” is said (Pace 20). This allows actors to take ownership with their boundaries. The third round of the game replaces a “no” response with the word “button,”
still allowing actors the ability to refrain from an activity, but also taking away the
sometimes daunting task of saying the negative “no” to a person in a position of power.
This allowed for a lively discussion of consent and its importance in the rehearsal room.
In a show with so much intimacy, actors absolutely need the autonomy and freedom to
speak up for themselves.

After discussions of using the term “button” any time an actor needs to seek
clarification, take a minute to process something, or communicate a boundary crossing to
another actor. In order to fully illustrate this idea, TIE suggests working through a process
they refer to as boundary practice. This practice has specified guidelines that appear in
the book, giving the leader of the practice a point by point guideline in the steps of the
practice. I find that reading through the lists keeps my mind focussed on what the actors
need to accomplish without forgetting any steps and leaving much less room for anyone
to feel unsafe. I had the actors start by picking their own partner, hoping that this first
step would allow them to select someone they might already feel more comfortable with
for the initial practice. A benefit for most of these individuals is that they had either been
through the boundary practice with me in a workshop format in November 2021, in a
class format last January with dance instructor Dan Stark, or with another individual
entirely. With the exception of Rosengren, everyone in attendance had done this with me
before. That said, I still felt it was necessary to do the practice several times, allowing the
actors to work with multiple partners. I explained that as they progressed through varying
partners, they may find their boundaries shifting. Additionally, I wanted them to
understand that their boundaries may shift from day to day. Being in tune with their own bodies and knowing their headspace will be of great important for this process.

One thing I wanted to make clear to the cast is that safety and comfort are two separate things. The biggest aspect that I want to make sure we are always keeping in mind is safety. If an actor feels unsafe, I have not done my job as a director. That said, comfort is something we often push in order to grow as individuals. I used the analogy of someone going to the gym. In order for the individual to see growth in their abilities, they often have to push past their comfort zones in order to get better. They can, however, end up pushing too hard and harming themselves. In this way, I want the actors to allow themselves room to grow throughout the process, but I never want them to feel like they need to do anything that is beyond the comfort of their boundaries.

After spending time on boundaries, we began blocking. The Andreas Theatre is where we would normally rehearse, but because the black box theatre allows for seating changes, the shop is in the midst of making a change from a corner configuration from the last show into a proscenium configuration for this show. That said, we are currently unable to use the actual space to rehearse. Since we are using a theater classroom instead of the actual stage, our spacing is a little tighter than it will be. In addition, we are currently using acting cubes and chairs to notate where furniture will be placed on the set. This means that blocking right now is more so done for a skeletal purpose as opposed to a specified final purpose. This is important for me to notate because aspects will certainly change when the team is able to move to the actual space.
Overall, I thought we had a successful rehearsal. The actors are receptive to my thoughts and seem ready to put their own spin on these characters. I am excited to see how the actors develop their characters over the process and look forward to this incredible adventure with them.

August 25, 2022

Late last night I received an email from Suarez. She was concerned about having to perform the simulated orgasm, mentioning that she knew I was looking for sincerity rather than an over the top “When Harry Met Sally” orgasmic moment. I offered to meet with her to discuss this in person. As such, we met today before rehearsal. Since this is the first show where I need to help direct performers on simulating orgasms on stage, I assured her that the process would be new for both of us. I also referenced some ideas from TIE’s workbook, citing ideas such as varying breath patterns and using consonants such as “s” and “v” to help make more formalized sounds (Pace 57-58). It seems like this provided her with some needed guidance and I appreciated that she felt comfortable telling me she was feeling some hesitancy in doing things “incorrectly”. Communicating is going to be a large part of this process and I thanked her for being open to that.

In continuing with intimacy exercises, I added on new elements today. After working through a boundary practice, actors were led through elements of opening and closing distance between two individuals. We did this by pretending our hands were separate actors. I then ran through a series of situations, asking actors to either slowly or
quickly close the distance between their hands. Afterwards, we discussed how opening and closing distance can establish different scenarios. For example, a character attempting to seduce another will approach that person very differently than if they were trying to harm them. In addition, the way the other character responds directly relates back to how they perceive the other character and what their own feelings are as well.

Once they had a good understanding of how this could be used in the intimate moments of the play, I talked about the three levels of touch that TIE describes in their book: a level one touch is a skin surface touch, a level two touch is a muscle surface touch, and a level three touch is a bone level touch (Pace 43-44). I then asked the actors to consider when each of these touches might be used, urging them to begin thinking about this as we are staging. Although I have thoughts on how the intimate moments might look, I also want to provide the actors with the freedom to establish the level of some of these touches with one another. Knowing their partner’s boundary levels, I think the levels of touch will add another layer of beauty to the more intimate scenes.

We finished blocking Act 1 this evening. I think we have a firm handle on the basic structure for the staging and I know this will allow us to add some firm muscles and flesh to the production. What I currently appreciate so far about this team is their willingness to ask questions and explore these characters in ways they had not necessarily considered. For example, I had a discussion this evening with Peterson about my perceptions of her character, Annie. My analysis left me firmly believing that Annie is aware that she is not heterosexual, but she also does not actively seek out romantic
relationships with women. Peterson had not considered this, but she said that it made more sense to her than how she originally viewed her character. At this time, she did not share her thoughts with me, but I hope that I can converse with her at further length to get her initial views. The collaboration that is already happening is truly beautiful.

**August 26, 2022 Production Meeting**

Things seem to be moving along for the production team. We had a new team member join us today, Sophia Itskovich. I am excited because this means we have a dedicated individual who will be working on props for the show. Although there are not many, the vibrators are going to be absolutely important for the production. I was quite impressed with Itskovich. Despite just signing on for props two days ago and receiving the script yesterday, she already had a presentation ready to go. This is promising and I cannot wait to see where she takes things from here.

It sounds like all areas are moving forward in the process. Although she was unable to attend the meeting due to work, Adams informed me earlier this week that she has already pulled corsets and started to pull costumes for actors. Fittings have already begun and are well underway. Finley shared some music choices today. This is excellent because Rotty expressed an ability to play the piano but that she would need time in order to feel confident in playing the pieces. This will allow me to send her information already and give her more time to feel comfortable in the songs. Smith expressed that the light hang is nearly complete and only some patchwork still needs to take place. She asked if
there was a timeline on when the platforms would be set but I did not have a clear answer for her. The seating changeover is moving along, but until it proceeds further, there is not much room on the stage to begin building the set. Stoeckel was not in attendance this morning and so we were unable to confer with her if she had any more specific details to share about that timeline.

Today was our first meeting back from the summer break and we were able to meet in person. Unfortunately, a team member had to Zoom in for the meeting due to a positive COVID test. This has me a little concerned, primarily because this is the third positive case I have heard of in the Theatre and Dance Department. My hope is that my cast and production team are all able to stay as healthy as possible, which I would certainly wish for regardless, but I am especially hopeful that no one else ends up catching it. My biggest worry is that an actor catching it will keep them out of rehearsal for a decent amount of time and then will run its course through the others as well. Giving that they all work within close proximities of each other in this show, I think it is so important that they stay as healthy as humanly possible. This is, of course, a “what if” moment and I need to trust that we will be able to manage through anything that may come our way in the process.

August 26, 2022

We started this evening with costume designer Adams in attendance. In order to get the actors ready to know what their costumes will feel like, it is important that they
begin working with pieces like corsets and rehearsal skirts. As such, Adams wanted to show the actors how to help one another into their corsets. She demonstrated on Ghostlon-Green and then had other actors pair up to help one another. In addition, she suggested that corseted actors show up thirty minutes prior to rehearsal to allow themselves time to get into them. I appreciated this as each of these items will drastically change movements for the actors and may require me to alter specific elements of the blocking.

After the corsets were all tied, I led the actors in another boundary practice. We reviewed the information we had discussed in previous rehearsals and then discussed tempo and timing. There is something wonderful in watching these individuals become more comfortable with one another and their own boundaries. If nothing else, I hope this idea sticks with them and that they are able to remember this as they move on to other shows. Being able to communicate boundaries is important, even beyond the theatrical world.

Actors are beginning to ask questions about their characters and I love delving into these conversations. They often leave me saying, “I had not thought about it, but let me ponder and get back to you tomorrow.” Some of these questions are related to the specific era. For example, are corsets considered a part of the undergarments? Do they stay on for the “treatment” that Dr. Givings offers? What would hand washing look like in this period? If we are using a bowl with a pitcher to wash hands, is there a towel that is also used? Or specific types of soap? In hindsight, perhaps some of these questions are
those that I should have already had answers for. In some ways, I feel like I may not
always be as prepared as necessary. On the other hand, it is also ok for me not to always
have the answer to a question. There is absolutely no way for me to anticipate everything
that will come up in rehearsal, and as such, I need to have grace with myself as well.

Act one is blocked now, although I know we will need to make modifications as
we progress. As I told the actors, we now have the skeletal structure for the movements
and will be able to establish muscle and flesh as we continue through the process. My
firm hope is that we can move into the Andreas on Monday. This will allow us to get a
feel for the actual space on the stage and allow the shop to begin building the set. I went
up to the Andreas before leaving and it looks like the scene shop team was able to get
through building the base structure for the seating. The only thing currently in the way is
the chair racks, and so I emailed the scene shop supervisor, George Grubb, in order to ask
about the possibility of having the space cleared for Monday. I do not anticipate this
being problematic, but look forward to hearing his thoughts.

August 28, 2022

I have cancelled this evening’s rehearsal. I have heard from several people in the
cast and crew that they have either tested positive for COVID or live with someone who
has tested positive for COVID. I would prefer to give the cast this time to test, rest, and
memorize. This will also allow me time to make sure everything is set for this week’s
rehearsals and to make any plans in case there are cast members missing. In the end, one missed rehearsal will not put us too terribly far behind.

**August 29, 2022**

Today has been incredibly stressful. On top of already having three designers who have tested positive for COVID, now both of my stage managers have also tested positive. In addition, I walked into the Andreas for our first rehearsal on stage and the space had not been cleared. To say I felt a little defeated is an understatement. I took a moment to just sit and process. Honerman helped me tape out the stage and move seats off the playing space. While they were not completely off the stage, this at least allowed us to get most of the set taped out.

Tonight as the first rehearsal where I felt like I really stepped up and directed. I think I have gotten too much into my head lately and have not allowed myself to really do my job. Collaboration is a beautiful thing, but the reality of this process is that I must lead the group and allow the group effort to come through naturally rather than in a forced manner. We were able to block Act Two, Scene One and I am happy with where the cast is. I know that there will be inevitable adjustments, but taking ownership of the important moments and trying to emphasize them in the blocking seems to lead me in the right direction. It allows me the ability to engage with the actors on a deeper level as well.
August 30, 2022

The more we are able to work through the script in the space, the more at ease I feel. Watching the performers come to life in the space where they will eventually perform this show makes everything feel all the more real. After tonight’s rehearsal, we have blocked all but the final intimate moment between Dr. And Mrs. Givings. I feel confident that we have a strong foundation to build on at this point and I look forward to finishing the blocking at tomorrow’s rehearsal.

I am especially impressed with the initiative the actors are taking in making decisions and their willingness to try new tactics. Lester is especially willing to try things a variety of ways and I find myself enthralled with his acting. Similarly, Peterson is finding ways to make her character known without stealing attention. I think this is vital for Annie because she has so few speaking lines but ultimately plays such a pivotal role in the play. Without her relationship with Mrs. Daldry, there would be no question of sexuality and the importance of connecting to others outside of a marital relationship.

At this point in time, I find myself trying to connect to a few of the actors on a deeper level. Actors such as Rotty, Suarez, and Rosengren are all strong individuals and bring important characteristics to the table, but I find that we do not always seem to connect on our interpretations of the characters or specific moments in the play. That said, all three seem open to conversations and trying things in a new way. As we progress, I look forward to seeing how we come together to fully flesh these characters our and create the necessary moments of connection.
August 31, 2022

I thoroughly enjoyed tonight’s rehearsal. Rather than focusing on another run through, we used the night to focus on specific moments. I called the actors at different times to further mold the moments of intimacy between these characters. I am finding that these moments are vital in establishing a comfort zone of the actors. In order for them to perform these scenes convincingly in front of one another and eventual audiences, they must first be comfortable with one another. I wish I had started this sooner, as I think it would have allowed for a more thorough approach at staging. This show slot has frequently left me feeling a little underprepared, as I feel like we must rush through certain things in order to get it ready to present in time. While I have no doubt this show can grow before opening, I do find myself wishing that the slot was not so early in the semester. I have found myself wondering on more than one occasion what the intention is with putting a show this early in the semester without giving it much room to work before the school year officially begins.

September 1, 2022 (Advising Meeting)

I was able to meet with Rovinsky today and I personally felt so much better after conversing with him. While I know that I am on the right path with the work for this show, I also know that I do not always convey information in the most concise way possible. Right now, it is unclear what the true concept of this show is in my writing. It is
important that I be able to convey this not only in my writing, but also to my designers and actors. Without a clearly defined purpose for producing this show, audiences will be left wondering what they saw and why they should care about the characters.

**September 1, 2022 (Rehearsal)**

We completed a first run through this evening. It was clear to me that we still have a significant amount of work to do. I found myself concerned at where the show was versus where I feel it should be, but I also recognize that I am putting more pressure on myself than is likely necessary. It is not uncommon for me to overanalyze my work, but I need to remember that while this timeline is shorter, we still have two full weeks of rehearsals left. On one hand this brings me comfort, but on the other hand this terrifies me. I believe we can continue to shape this work in that time, though the progress will need to be made quickly.

Most of what I took away from tonight was reminding the actors that they are allowed to play. This not only means they are allowed to move freely throughout the space, but it also means they able to have fun with these characters. Right now, I have hit too far into the spectrum of realism and it does not read well for this show. This is something I have found myself doing in previous shows, so I know I can make necessary adjustments and begin correcting the moments that do not read well currently.

One of the aspects I need to address is decorum during this period. I think it may be engaging to do drills with the cast each night to really practice these differences in
behavior. How we act today is significantly different than the late 1800s, varying from how big our footfalls occur to men standing up when a lady enters the room. I think having fun with these differences is a way to engage the actors to understanding that while the period was restrictive and prim and proper, the energy this show requires asks the actors to have fun.

I think that I may have lead the actors in the wrong direction by telling them the show is realistic and sincere. While this is true, I think it has made them believe they must remain rather emotionless. Allowing them to find the humor and play with these roles is what will make this show relatable. It may be a challenge moving forward, but I know this is one of the keys to creating a show the audience will connect and resonate with on a more personal level.

**September 2, 2022 (Production Meeting)**

The more production meetings we have, the more excited I become to see, hear, and experience the designer’s visions. I asked Smith today about the possibility of incorporating varied lights to take us out of the reality of the paroxysms in the show. After talking to Rovinsky, I think this will be a good way to notate the split in reality and what is occurring in the minds and bodies of those undergoing treatment with Dr. Givings. Smith was ready to jump at this and said she had similar thoughts after watching a run last night. It is always a moment of beauty when people on the team are having similar thoughts.
September 2, 2022 (Rehearsal)

This evening started off with me calling only a few individuals to work on intimate moments. I called Peterson and Rotty to work on their kiss first. I am finding that if I am not firm about being on task, some of the actors take that to mean they can use the time for their own conversations. This was one of those times, and I am finding that I need to be more clear that when we are called to rehearse, it is not the time to tell jokes and avoid work, but rather get to the task at hand. It is possible in this case that this was an avoidance technique, but it is still important that I be clear on expectations. We were able to work through most of the mechanics of this moment, but Peterson is still stuck too much in her head. She requested that we not complete the kiss this evening. I voiced that it would be OK to do so, but that come Wednesday, we need to be completing moments of intimacy in order to get comfortable with them and have them read seamlessly to an audience.

I then worked with Honerman and Ghostlon-Green to address the gynecological exam that Dr. Givings gives Elizabeth. I realized much too late that because there were lines happening in the other room at the time of the exam, I had neglected to block it. However, this moment is rather quick and we were easily able to establish what that exam might look like given the quick timing. Both actors seemed comfortable and confident and we were then able to move on.
This, however, is where rehearsal began to deteriorate. I called all the cast and explained that we would be doing a working run, which meant I would stop them as we went through to try things in a new way or readdress behaviors of the time period and how we are or are not currently following them. After finishing, I asked if there were any questions or anything the cast wanted addressed. Rotty looked to the other actors and said, “Should I do it? Should I? Should I say it? I’m going to go for it.” The other actors appeared to either have no knowledge of what she was talking about or a look of discomfort. I was then told that many of the actors felt uncomfortable with my child being at rehearsal and they felt they could not perform to the best of their abilities because it was a boundary for them. Rotty asked repeatedly for others to speak up, but no one else had a word to say.

To say I was completely taken by surprise is an understatement. While I typically try to live by the old adage of “leaving my bags at the door,” the previous forty-eight hours has left me in an emotional drain, and the baggage I had attempted to suppress came right to my side. In tears, I expressed that while I understood what the actor was saying, I did not feel that seven people staring me down in a confrontational setting was perhaps the best way to do it. In addition, having cast my husband in the production, we are currently struggling to find childcare in the evenings for her. Rotty felt the need to repeat herself several times, which left me feeling unheard and attacked. I told the cast I needed five minutes to process and then we would move forward. After those five minutes, I called everyone back. I was told Rotty needed some more time. Another five
minutes went by and I asked Ghostlon-Green to go check on Rotty. Ghostlon-Green came back and informed me that Rotty was leaving and would not be attending the rest of the rehearsal. Not wanting to lose any more rehearsal, I said OK and asked the other actors to get into places for the run.

Despite this roadblock, the rest of the rehearsal was actually quite productive. We were able to overcome the moment and get through a significant portion of the show, really working on key moments and behaviors. Rotty’s absence was clearly noticed however, and those are now moments we will need to work on at a later date. During a break, I asked if anyone had Rotty’s number so I could call her. Ghostlon-Green gave it to me and I was able to call Rotty and discuss things a bit further. I still did not feel completely heard, but I did my best to just listen to what she had to say and assured her I would try to find alternatives for those moments. At the end of the day, I could have handled the situation a bit better. I believe that while I was undergoing my own stress, it seems Rotty is undergoing different types of stress. It is important to take this knowledge and strive forward.

September 5, 2022

Tonight began the dreaded journey of memorized nights, or “off book” nights, for the actors. I was pleasantly surprised with how prepared the actors each seemed, and I am thankful that they are putting in work outside of rehearsal time. This gives me hope that they will continue to flesh out these characters in their own time as well as with one
another. I love how freely the ensemble works together, working through lines while on breaks or offering insight and moments of support throughout the process.

I readdressed Friday’s events this evening, mentioning that I hoped there were no hard feelings and expressing a readiness to put the events behind us and move forward. Everyone seemed receptive and we all seemed to bond over it. I think that while Friday was more than I had anticipated happening, it has been a beautiful learning process for all of us involved.

**September 6, 2022**

Today’s rehearsal marked the first run for off book of act two. This act seemed a little less prepared than last night’s, but I still felt it was clear the actors are putting in time to work on their dialogue. I found myself stopping them throughout to redirect blocking in certain moments to allow for clearer focus on who audience members should be paying attention to. I feel like I am finally finding my groove with this piece and with these actors. Overall, I believe we have a solid show developing.

I discovered tonight that I do not like where the final moment is placed. I want to ask designer Smith her thoughts on moving the final moment to the center of the stage rather than tucked behind the corner. She has a lighting instrument placed here, but I also do not want to cause any problems to her design either. I am trying to find my voice and work more closely with the designers in exploring the possible options for given moments.
September 7, 2022

I find that the rehearsals where I am able to separate call times are proving incredibly beneficial for both the actors and myself. Why I did not do more of them earlier in the process is a mystery to me, but I imagine that in the pursuit of greatness we can never truly achieve perfection. The learning process never really stops for me, and as a lifelong learner and educator, I hope that always remains true. That said, I hope to move forward with this in mind and remember that it is ok to take time rather than rush through a process.

Aside from this moment of clarity in taking more time to finesse moments with actors, Suarez shared tonight that although she thought she would be comfortable with Honerman wearing only a modesty pouch, she no longer feels this will be the case. I am glad that she felt comfortable telling me this as we were working this scene, though it did change how I need to progress. I asked the actors if we could pause the scene progress until I had the evening to think this new information over. This was probably for the best in a variety of ways, including the fact that we were running out of rehearsal time. After thinking it through, I believe there are some easy solutions to make the scene just as intimate as it would be if Honerman were to lose all of his clothes. I look forward to working this out at the start of rehearsal tomorrow with the two of them.
If this process is teaching me anything, it is that no two people communicate exactly in the same manner. While attempting to ready the team for a designer run that Paul, Adams, and Alexander attended, Rotty walked into space and seemed upset about something. She immediately walked to Adams and expressed concern about not being able to use costumes until dress rehearsal. This is a concern that was already on my list and something Adams and I had discussed, especially because so many of these moments will affect the timing of the show. We were already running a little late in starting the run because I was working on the final moment with Suarez and Honerman, and I wanted to address Rotty’s concern while moving rehearsal forward. I requested that we put the conversation on hold until the end of rehearsal since we could not attempt to “fix” the problem in the moment. I was met with hostility and anger from Rotty, who continued to repeat her concerns. After taking a moment, I once again asked if we could move forward with rehearsal as Adams would still be here at the end to further address the concerns. Once again I was met with anger and told I was embarrassing her in front of everyone else. I apologized and mentioned that I did not know where the anger was coming from, as I felt I was speaking respectfully and trying to move rehearsal forward while also addressing her concerns. I was met with a bitter response of, “When did I say you were disrespectful?”

It was clear that the cast was negatively affected and I told them each to take five minute to collect themselves and check their props. Rotty stormed out of the room,
slamming doors. I took those next five minutes to try and reframe my mindset. In this case, I do not know how I should have handled the situation differently. I acknowledged concerns with respect while attempting to do my job and move the rehearsal forward. In the previous concern with this actor, I know I could have reacted in a better light, but I just do not feel that was true here. The disrespect from this actor is something I am incredibly concerned about, and truthfully, I would replace her if I had more time. I can firmly express that I would not cast this individual again, as the negative environment she is creating affects everyone, not just me and her.

When we came back from our five minute collective period, Rotty had still not returned. I told stage management that we were starting regardless, as I had already wasted twenty minutes of the design team’s time. To say that it was not a great rehearsal is an understatement. The actors were clearly affected and it showed with the amount of times they had to call line. While I wanted to just call it a night, I knew that the design team at least needed to see as much of the run as possible. I allowed the show to continue, taking minimal notes and mostly using the time to discuss with designers the remaining things that need to happen ahead of technical rehearsals next week.

September 9, 2022 (Final Production Meeting)

Our final production meeting proved fruitful in moving forward ahead of next week’s technical rehearsals. One concern I still have that needs to be addressed revolves around the use of real flame. Stockel informed me today that Grubb needs more
information before deciding if we can use the real flame. I truly believe this show needs the real flame to depict the differing viewpoints of electricity versus nature. The other concern I have is whether we can have falling snow in the final moments of the play. I know we addressed this in earlier meetings, but Stockel seemed completely taken aback by this information. It is possible that she was not present at the meetings as she did miss a few, but it does make me question if the reports stage management sends out are read by everyone. Either way, we are moving in the right direction and I am looking forward to seeing these technical elements come to life this next week.

**September 9, 2022 (Rehearsal)**

Tonight may have been one of the most fruitful rehearsals thus far. I appreciated that we were able to work specific scenes. I had originally wanted to do a “stop and go” rehearsal for act one. Typically, I use these rehearsals to stop actors as we need to make modifications and adjustments and then we go back and continue. Honerman, however, was unable to attend rehearsal due to a prior engagement. I decided the best use of rehearsal would be to call moments that he was not involved in and work those instead. I was impressed with the work Rosengren put in. I have struggled with trying to age his character a bit, so I really wanted to work with him today. I threw many suggestions out and he was willing to try each of them. I am excited to see how he continues to grow as a performer, even beyond this production.
**September 11, 2022**

It still felt like there was some hostility this evening. At moments when I would try to talk to Rotty, I was not even looked at. It became clear that something was off and I need to address it. I am struggling with where to begin, as I want to honor Rotty’s feelings while also recognizing that I have also felt slighted. I plan to reach out to Rovinsky and get some input on how to move forward from here.

**September 12, 2022**

I feel like we finally are starting to find these characters. I wish I had even one more week to work on this process, but I know we are working on this show to the best of our abilities. The cast seemed to be in good spirits today and it showed in their run. Even Rotty was ready to work and really shape her character. I appreciated that it seemed to be much less hostile and I hope this will continue.

I was reassured today by Rovinsky. There are many moments where I have felt intimidated by Rovinsky, but this is purely because I respect his opinion and truly want to learn from him. I cherish his help and advice in all pieces of the process so far, but I was especially grateful that he took the time to help me brainstorm ideas to move forward with actor disagreements.
September 13, 2022

I have been tired from shows before, but I do not think anything compares to the tiredness I feel during this process. It is a quick turn around and I do not feel like I have the right amount of time to do this show as much justice as it deserves. My biggest concern right now is the tempo and pacing of the show, as it feels like it is trudging along rather than playfully guiding audiences. Meeting with Rovinsky after the run allowed me some clarity in ideas to help pick this up, but I am beginning to feel a bit defeated. I firmly believe that this time slot is tricky and could use some reevaluations. For example, what is the feasibility in allowing the first show to be cast the previous spring semester? This is not unprecedented, and while it may discount some students, such as incoming freshmen, from being considered, it would help ease this process significantly for all involved.

In addition, I have not found the right way to communicate to Suarez all that is demanded of her character. While I think Suarez has a natural talent, I find myself unsure of how to help her chisel her skills and allow her to become a bit more comfortable in taking control of her actions. I am hoping that adding some more physicality to her character will allow her to feel a bit more free in her body and encourage her to explore more.

I find myself frustrated that there are still so many things that need to be done before we open in one short week. I keep hopeful that progress will happen, but at times I have second guessed my abilities in directing this beautiful piece in such a quick turn...
around. Working with seasoned professionals in this timeframe is one thing, but working with students who are taking classes, working, and have other commitments outside of the project is daunting. I see the light at the end of the tunnel, but some days it seems like the light is just from the oncoming train.

September 14, 2022

It is amazing to me what a speed through line reading can do to tighten time for actors. Some of the actors seemed to think this exercise was a waste of time, as there were many late cues due to people being on their phones and not listening, but it was clear when we started to work scenes that the speed through made them more aware of how much pausing they had been doing. I had to pick up my daughter from dance, so I did not get to rehearsal until the cast was nearing the end of the speed through. Had I been there sooner, I would have addressed the phones and not actively listening. Since they were nearing the end, I did not want to step in and make it take more time.

We really focused on humor and tempo this evening. Ruhl has such a keen understanding of humor and it is not currently reading in the audience. Specifying these moments and really taking time to allow actors to deliver the lines in different ways was fun to watch. They actually started playing again instead of just robotically going through the motions. This gives me hope. Although we only have a few more rehearsals before we open, it is clear that nothing is set in stone.
There are moments where I have questioned my choice in casting my husband. This is not because I do not think he is a talented theatre artist, but more so because the complexities of marriage make it a bit strange to watch him interact romantically with another person. It is not so much watching him kiss Suarez or embrace her, but more so hearing his voice in those moments. I can easily delineate the theatrical moments visually, but I am having a hard time doing so when it comes to the auditory aspect. I think this may be holding me back from helping the two in their more intimate moments, and I need to let it go and move forward for the sake of the production.

I love this play and playwright. I did not realize just how difficult it would be to put this show together. But I am learning so much throughout the process. I rely too much on my logical brain and need to allow myself the room to create on a more theatrical and even abstract level.

September 15, 2022

The production is moving along and we are heading into the world of technical rehearsals. This both excites and terrifies me as there is still so much left to do. I see the pieces coming together, but I am afraid that some of them are coming a bit too slowly. It is clear that I need to learn how to use my voice and remember that it is OK to ask questions. There were a few moments that left me a little worried after tonight. As someone who has a full schedule, I absolutely understand being busy and having to prioritize certain details over others. I am starting to feel like some of the elements of this
show are taking less priority than others and I do not feel like we have the time for that anymore. If any of the technical elements is missing, this show will not succeed. I am hopeful that over the next few days, these elements take more priority for those working on them so that the actors are not waiting until the last minute to work with all the moving pieces in this show. I think not allowing the actors enough time to work with everything will ultimately cause problems and put more stress and undue pressure on them. This is most certainly not something I want to see happen.

September 16, 2022

As we continue to add pieces to the production, I am starting to see the world of the play come together. It is easy to take the small things for granted, but they truly aid in establishing a time that is not today but also a world that deals with problems that are still prevalent now. That said, we are down to crunch time and I still feel like there are so many things that are missing. I am hoping that these next few days will prove fruitful in completing the process. Everyone is busy, but this show is so ornate and needs these attentions to detail. If the world stopped every time someone was busy, I do not believe it would rotate at all.

Honerman hurt his ankle before the start of the show. I do not know why, but evidently there was a piece of 2 x 4 lying backstage behind a curtain that he did not see. In attempting to walk over the curtain and around an acting cube sitting there, he stepped right on it and rolled his ankle in the process. I had him ice it for a bit in hopes that it
would help. This pushed back start time, but I was far more concerned about his injury and making sure that there were no other loose boards around that someone else could get hurt on. The designers and board operators were all very understanding, which I appreciated. Safety certainly needs to be at the forefront of our mind.

September 17, 2022

Lighting designer Smith has developed COVID and will unfortunately not be able to join us again. We are very fortunate that her advisor, Steve Smith, has stepped in to help us in these final moments. I let the better part of my anxiety get me about it initially, but I know we are in good hands. Advisor Smith has been nothing short of pleasant in making sure that everything is working as needed. I am thankful that we have such wonderful technical advisors in this process. They have aided many times and for that, I am incredibly grateful. If nothing else, it has reminded me of the goodness of humanity and reinforced how I want to treat those I work with as well.

Tonight was needed for so many reasons. I am glad that Adams and I were able to talk her advisor into letting us run with the costumes before our first official dress rehearsal. We were able to take the time to work each costume removal and it seemed to help the actors feel better about the timing issues we had been having previously. When it came down to it, I am thankful I used my voice to aid the actors in that moment. They deserved to feel confident in those changes, especially ahead of an audience for tomorrow’s run.
September 18, 2022

The evening began with my truthfully feeling unprepared. I forgot to block a curtain call last night and we had an audience. I was so nervous about having an audience tonight, especially because it was our first dress run. Last night absolutely helped in allowing us a bit more time working with them ahead of that, but I could tell my actors were feeling hesitant in having an audience so much earlier than we had initially anticipated. Normally we would not have an audience at this point, but the creative team, cast, and crew of the other show being produced at Minnesota State University, Mankato, Disney's High School Music, was only able to attend this evening.

All nerves aside, I think the audience is actually what we all really needed. It let the actors know that what they are working on is coming across to audiences. In addition, it let me know where moments of humor were shining through and where moments of great emotional impact were landing the way I had hoped they would. The pacing also picked up tonight, which has been one of my biggest concerns. I hope that over the next few nights, this continues to be the case. Although the snow and real flame caused a lot of conversation in whether we would be able to do them or not, I am so glad I fought for those elements. They clearly worked the way I had intended, as the audience had audible reactions to those moments.
September 19, 2022

It was a weird experience to go from having audience response back to just the designers and I at the run this evening. The energy was a bit different, but after tonight I do not think that will be a problem. People in the seats really does change things.

That said, the actors are ready. They have poured their hearts into this show and I think it really shows. This show has asked so much of them — as have I — and they have always been willing to try new things. I have so much gratitude for the actors, crew, and designers. We have certainly had our road bumps, but at the end of the day, I could not have completed any of this without them.

September 20, 2022

Our final rehearsal. It is a bittersweet feeling to watch the work you have been tirelessly attending to for the last five weeks come to an end. Truthfully, there are some feelings of relief on my end. Having been “neck deep” in research the last several months has certainly had its overwhelming moments, but I cannot say that I would change the show selection. There are certainly ways in which I would have handled my directing approach a bit differently, but I will get more into that in Chapter Four. I am proud of the work we have accomplished together. It may not be a show for everyone, but it most assuredly is my kind of theatre. I only hope that those who are brave enough to come see
a show with the word “vibrator” in the title will be open enough to receiving the message and being reminded that our emotions and how we communicate them are what make us unique. I find myself rediscovering what it means to love others — I just hope the audience will, too.

**September 21, 2022**

Opening night yielded a responsive audience. I always know our theater colleagues will respond to shows, but I do worry a bit more about the general public reactions. It was evident that I did not need to be as concerned as I had thought. There were moments of laughter, moments with gasps, and moments with audible “ahh” sounds at the beautiful connections being made between the characters. I truthfully could not have asked for a better opening night audience and I hope the rest of them continue to respond in kind.

**September 22, 2022**

Tonight was special to me because the department allowed a respondent for the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF) to attend our show and provide us with feedback. I fought vehemently for this for several reasons, including that I wanted to receive feedback from someone outside of the department on my work. This does not mean I do not value the input of my professors, rather that I wanted to have as much feedback as possible now that I am nearing the end of my time here at Minnesota
State University, Mankato. Theater is such a subjective art style and I think it is important to receive feedback as a means to hone your skills and analyze the work you do. This does not mean you need to agree with everything you hear, but it does allow you to think about things differently than you may have otherwise.

Susan Hansen, who teaches at Riverland Community College in Austin, Minnesota, was our respondent. I was thrilled to learn that she thoroughly enjoyed the show. One of my greatest concerns up to this point has been the pacing. This was the last element to begin falling into place and I am still not sure it is exactly where it needs to be, but Hansen commented that she felt the breaks in the quick pacing worked well. I was glad to hear this, but I want to keep an eye on the pacing. There are some moments where actors are starting to lengthen the pauses and I do not know if this is intentional or if they are unaware they are beginning to lengthen them. I never know if it is appropriate to give actor notes once you hit the run of a performance. In the past, I have had directors give me notes as an actor during a production run, but more often than not they refrain from doing so. I imagine there is not a “right” or “wrong” answer to this, but given some tension in the process I am not sure whether it would be received well. For now, I will remain silent and see how this develops.

Overall, Hansen’s response was quite positive. It was clear that she loved the work of the designers and she was particularly smitten with Lester’s performance as Leo. I absolutely agreed with this, as he is one of my favorite people to watch in this show. His level of commitment and dedication to doing his best work is quite clear. I never doubted
that he was working on his own throughout the process and he often brought me
questions to help develop his character. I firmly believe Lester will go far in his acting
career so long as he continues to work in this manner.

The response both from Hansen and the audience leaves me hopeful that our
message is quite clear. Hansen articulated our success in filling the production with a
variety of ideas in a rather short period of time. I could not stop smiling after her response
and am thankful the department allowed her to attend the show. Some things are just
worth fighting for.

**September 23, 2022**

I always worry about Friday audiences, as they typically are a bit less responsive
than others. This was not true tonight, as they laughed, cried, and shared their love of the
production after the show was done. I believe this is one of the strongest productions I
have worked on so far in my career, and the knowledge that I continue to grow is
satisfying. If we cannot learn and grow from our opportunities, what is the point in doing
them?

The pauses continue to grow and I am still unsure if I should say anything at this
point. I have chosen to let it go, but I believe this is a trait I need to evaluate moving
forward. If the performances start to change the intent we spent weeks rehearsing, then
the vision of the show is not as clear as it should be. In this case, I do believe it is OK to
give notes to actors.
September 24, 2022

Closing is always a bittersweet feeling. I am not sure that the reality this production is done will hit me until I am not coming to rehearsal on Monday. I am thankful we do not have a strike this evening, as I believe I would probably be in tears. This show has consumed my life for the last several months, especially the last five weeks, and it is a little surreal that the production is at an end. Certainly, I have writing to complete in the next few weeks, as well as a thesis defense, but that is not done with anyone else. It is a little more isolated than the actual production.

Tonight’s audience was responsive, but they felt quite a bit different than our other audiences. I do not know if this was because they were tired, unsure of the subject matter, or something else. That said, they still clearly felt emotion throughout. I do not know what happened, but the doorknob for the “Next Room” kept falling off. This had not happened before and it continued to be a concern for the actors. I went up with stage management during intermission to try and solve the problem — we thought we had, but the doorknob fell off again during act two. Thankfully, Honerman was quick on his feet and just removed it. He communicated with the other actors backstage not to shut the door, but rather leave it cracked. This would allow them all to use the door, leave the problematic doorknob behind, and still move from one room to the next. This appeared to work well. It was not until after the show was over that I discovered Peterson had inadvertently closed the door, leaving Honerman trapped in the laboratory. That said, the
handle was on the floor and he once again was able to think quickly on his feet and insert it to open the door one last time. I do not believe I breathed for a good portion of this show, but I did trust that the actors would figure our a solution.

I am ultimately proud of this production and the work we were able to complete in a short amount of time. The audience responses were typically what I had hoped for, leaving me feeling accomplished. I am so thankful I was able to journey into the next room with these people, and I hope for similar opportunities to arise in the future.
CHAPTER IV

POST PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

This chapter will examine the final production elements for my direction of Sarah Ruhl’s *In The Next Room or the vibrator play*. It is my firm belief that the true success of a play is when the audience leaves having enjoyed the performance and understood the production’s objective. After several performances, I was met with comments such as, “What a beautifully paced show,” and “The comedy helped balance out the serious and taboo moments to avoid feeling awkward.” In addition, several individuals expressed that this was their favorite production they had ever seen at Minnesota State University, Mankato. While this may not be true for everyone, I am thrilled the production resonated so deeply with these individuals. A friend who happens to be a registered nurse sent me a lengthy response, commenting that “the message of the show is so powerful” and “your thesis was truly inspiring and caused me to reflect on the kind of provider I want to be when I start my own practice!” Given statements like this, I believe various members of the audience understood the production’s goal while simultaneously enjoying the experience. Despite the warm responses, there is always a need to examine the process to determine areas of improvement for future collaborations. Each of the elements detailed in Chapter I, as well as additional production elements, will be analyzed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of this production.
Style and pacing are elements that are crucial to making this play work. It is vital that the production focus on both the comedic moments and the more intimately sincere moments as well. One of these characteristics without the other drastically changes the delivery of the show. That said, the importance of hitting a variety of emotional appeals in this script became the subject for several table discussions during the rehearsal process.

For a time, arguably too long, I pushed the actors to find the sincerity. I did not want the show to just read as a comedic piece, especially because Ruhl intends for a clear variety of emotional appeals to the audience. There is heart throughout the piece, and ignoring this aspect is a trap I wanted to avoid falling into. Having seen many people perform the paroxysm moments for acting competitions, I did not want our production to play these merely for comedy. The audience should feel some discomfort during this show, but not so much that they want to walk out during intermission.

The problem with focusing for so long on the sincere moments is that it lost all of the humor. Ruhl is a smart playwright and has jokes throughout, meant to allow the audience room to chuckle and feel comfortable in the awkward laughs that happen as well. Sometimes, it is pivotal that an audience knows they are allowed these moments to release their discomfort. As I continued to watch and realized that we were not hitting these moments, I encouraged the actors to look for those places. In some cases, these jokes were quite obvious. Catherine Givings, played by Natalie Suarez, has a moment where she recalls childbirth: “When I gave birth I remember so clearly, the moment her head was coming out of my body, I thought: Why would any rational creature do this
twice, knowing what I know now?” (In the Next Room 32). In other cases, moments that I thought were clear did not seem to be as apparent to the actors and I had to explain them. After walking in the rain together, Catherine and Mr. Daldry, played by Chandler Rosengren, discuss the moisture:

Mrs. Givings: I must be a very inconsistent person! I like to be wet and then I like to be dry and then I like to be wet again!

Mr. Daldry: You are very healthy and robust. I could barely keep up with you. (In the Next Room 20)

What I had thought to be a fairly obvious joke did not seem to be understood by the actors. After pointing out the humor in this moment, I encouraged the actors to deliver them in a variety of ways. I believe that although we did not work on these as long as we probably should have, the hard work that happened in the last week and a half of rehearsals was clear in the final product. There were certainly exceptions to this rule, as no two of the four audiences responded in quite the same manner. The audience laughter was clear each evening and the moments of silence at the more intimate scenes reflected their understanding of the severity these moments truly held for the characters. As a director, I wish I had spent more time on these varying moments. It would have aided in the overall clarity for the audience, though I do think we progressed to a point of clear differentiation.

In addition to working on these moments of humor and sincerity, believing the characters were living in the late 1800s was important. The standards and beliefs in this
era were significantly different than how we live today. Although there were moments where it seemed we were not living here and now, this is an area where I felt I faltered.

One of the reasons I selected this show for my thesis production is because I firmly believed it would push me in ways I had not stretched myself as a director. Being in a particular period is one of the ways I had not challenged myself. Although I did research on etiquette in this era, I do not feel that I always captured the essence of expectations.

Certain actors seemed more receptive to fitting into these standards. Experience certainly played a part in this. Seth M. Honerman, who played Dr. Givings, and Joshua Lester, who played Leo Irving, were among those who already had experience in period plays. These gentlemen were able to carry themselves in a manner that seemed appropriate to the period. I worked closely with Rosengren to push him to convey characteristics of the period. This involved a variety of rehearsals in which I asked Rosengren to explore different ways of standing, walking, and generally how he carried himself. I found that this seemed to push him to really evaluate how this character would carry himself as a wealthy gentleman of the Victorian Era. I saw several changes in him when he discovered that his posture changed how he interacted with others. In this particular scenario, I felt I was somewhat successful. Rosengren grew throughout the rehearsals, but I wish I had set aside more time to push him in regards to carrying himself as an older, wealthier gentleman. There were moments where this read well, but there were moments, such as when he would come into the Givings’ home, where I should have pushed the expectations in areas such as wearing a hat indoors.
Working with the female characters is where I felt I faltered a bit more. Women of this era were seen and not heard, and while I felt that we captured moments of this, I also wondered if I could have worked more closely with these particular actors to delve into how that changed throughout the piece. Catherine in particular should change throughout the show, being a rule following wife and becoming a voice filled individual who fights for what she wants. Suarez arguably grew from the beginning of this process until the end, but pushing her to really feel those moments of restriction and being caged in isolation may have changed how the audience perceived her growth as a character. The actor who I believed I was able to really help capture this essence of being seen and not heard was Faith Peterson as Annie. She had a refined approach to the character. Although she had few lines, she was frequently on stage and her presence was noticeable enough but not to a degree that she took away from the other things happening on stage. This of course remained true until Annie finally breaks down her barrier enough to kiss Mrs. Daldry, which left for a rather heartbreaking moment of rejection. The audience response in that moment created a palpable sense of heartache. Perhaps if I had used Peterson as an example for the others, the era expectations may have been clearer amongst the female characters. In the future, I believe sending everyone an etiquette handbook would also be helpful, as well as drilling how to stand, sit, walk, and generally carry oneself.

The pacing was another area where I struggled through the process. It was not until we entered technical rehearsals that the pacing started to pick up and made more sense for the overall flow of the show. After repeated rehearsals of feeling like the pacing
was not aiding the storytelling, I led the actors in a speed through. It was clear that most of them had never done this process before, but it is one I am very familiar with from my summers working at the Northern Fort Playhouse in Summit, South Dakota. Essentially, this involves actors reciting their lines as quickly as possible, while maintaining character choices and enunciation but closing the gaps between lines. I noticed immediately when we ran through the show after the speed through that the actors were unconsciously delivering their lines more tightly. There were far fewer gaps in the pace and the show finally started to click together. One area where I felt I needed to address the pacing more was once we went into performance mode. There were moments where the pauses started to get longer and longer each night, and I wish I had addressed it with the actors so this did not continue to be a problem. The greatest culprit of this was Liza Rotty, who played Mrs. Daldry. I am not sure if the lengthened pauses were intentionally getting longer or if she was unaware of it, but I did not address it. In the future, I will not be afraid to give notes to performers after the show has opened. I firmly believe that we all can continue to grow and improve, even after audiences are in the seats.

Certainly, the acting performances are pivotal to the audience’s understanding of the author’s thoughts and intentions. Ruhl’s messages are best conveyed in the relationships between the beautifully craft characters. The change in power dynamics throughout the show are most easily seen through those relationships, allowing the audience to connect to the empowerment many of the characters find throughout. That said, each performer’s ability to work as an ensemble for this show is of the utmost
importance. If the character relationships are unclear or there is a lack of power dynamics and shifts, the show does not fully realize the playwright’s intent. It is vital then to assess the work of the actors’ character portrayals, as well as my role in both casting and acting coaching.

Catherine Givings is undoubtably the center of In The Next Room. Without her changing beliefs and attitudes, the play would not function in the same way. It was important that whoever played Catherine had a strong presence and sense of urgency. Suarez absolutely tackled this role with a dedication that any director would be lucky to work with in the future. In addition to showing up to rehearsals prepared, Suarez was ready to ask clarifying questions. An area of strength I found in this process was creating a room where individuals felt free to “fail” and knew they could ask questions or challenge ideas without negative consequences. Suarez took advantage of this atmosphere and grew throughout the process. When asked to try a scene in a varying way, she was ready to find a new method to the approach. In some areas, these subtle changes made a drastic change, while in others, a directorial push would have aided more.

The area where Suarez was most successful seemed to be the beginning nature of Catherine. As a rather timid person herself, Suarez questioned herself throughout the process. Towards the end, she was willing to take bigger risks. Had this process been a bit longer, the changes would likely have pushed further as well. It is always easy for a younger actor to question their choices, especially when paired with an older, more seasoned actor. This became true in some regards for Suarez as she acted opposite
Honerman, but she held strong in her own choices and seemed to fully grasp the growth Catherine experiences from the beginning to the end of the show. In hindsight, creating a stronger connection to Catherine could be accomplished through pushing her even further in the emotional states of the character.

Perhaps the biggest challenge in acting was more reliant on initial staging than on the actors themselves. The final moment between Suarez and Honerman is one that needed more finesse and time. Originally written to be a climactic moment between husband and wife in a moment of passionate intercourse, our production instead ended with the couple dancing. This stemmed not out of a disregard for the playwright’s intent, but rather a boundary complication that arose in the rehearsal process. After attempting to stage the scene in a variety of methods and locations with Honerman and Suarez, it was clear that both actors felt uncomfortable. In this regard, the insecurities of Suarez began to influence Honerman’s receptiveness to the scene, which is understandable. It was at this time that a decision must be made to honor actor boundaries and the overall intention of the playwright — an intimate moment between the couple. While this was achieved in many ways, reflecting on this piece may have led to a more female dominated lead.

Rather than having Dr. Givings lead the dance, Catherine leading him after helping him up would have better encompassed the shift in power between the two. This is an area to consider in the future; when plans change, dedicated thoughts must be involved in moving forward, especially in a shorter rehearsal process.
Honerman’s distinct challenge was creating a character who loves humanity and desires to help it, but is unsure how to display this love to his own wife. Thinking he meets standards of a rather unemotional period, Dr. Givings does not sense any trouble in his marriage. With the dawn of electricity relevant throughout so much of the production, the sparks should also be evident in Dr. Givings’ personality. Honerman executed this with a stunning grace. His natural stiff nature lends well to period pieces, as it comes across as the male expectations of distance and separation in the era. His indifference toward Suarez until the end of the show aided in the clear rift between the couple.

Because of Honerman’s grasp on the character and the production’s intention, there were times where direction was not as specific as necessary. This was a true challenge for me in a variety of ways; there is a mutual respect and admiration between us as directors and artistic individuals. Arguably, I allow myself to take the background in many ways, viewing Honerman on a pedestal of directing. This is an aspect I grappled with throughout the process until Honerman pulled me aside one night and said I needed to let go of the idea that he already has his Master in Fine Arts in Directing and allow myself to tell the story the way I wanted to tell it. This spoke volumes to me and I was once again reminded of the importance of Ruhl’s play. As Honerman’s spouse, I do not have to take a backseat in our endeavors. Through this process, I was reminded that I know what I am doing and was able to offer Honerman more suggestions in connecting with his fellow actors in the show.
Rosengren’s performance as Mr. Daldry was rather realistic and static. Meant mostly to help the plot progress, Mr. Daldry serves some pivotal roles. Rather than openly caring about his wife’s ailments, he is more concerned about how it directly affects him. Rosengren captured a dry, honest version of Mr. Daldry. His work in the etiquette of the area progressed throughout the process, though his young nature made the character seem a bit more daft than intended. Continued classes in advanced techniques will absolutely polish Rosengren’s skills, as he is ready to adapt to new challenges. When pushed to try things in a new way, he is more than ready to tackle the prompt. Had I asked Rosengren to make Mr. Daldry a bit more smarmy, the clear distinction of characters would have been even stronger.

Mrs. Daldry goes through a significant change throughout the play. From a timid, unsure girl-like individual to a newly awakened and empowered woman, she travels a significant journey. Rotty was able to capture some of these changes in her approach. Her consistency lended toward creating a character that seemed plausible. Although consistent, Rotty’s approach seemed to drastically differ from the rest of the ensemble. While most of the others seemed rather rooted in realism, this was not as true for her moments on stage. One of the challenges I never really surmounted was communicating with Rotty. We seem to have drastically different styles of communication, and this became problematic in conversing about the production itself. Rather than allowing our differences to be a talking point, it often resulted in Rotty becoming upset and slamming doors. This is an area where I need to improve moving forward. Although I had never
encountered quite as adversarial of an actor before, it is likely it will happen again and I need to know how to approach it. Rather than letting things go and creating a negative environment for myself, and subsequently others, I will address this problem in a more clear method. This will allow all parties to feel heard and create an environment where it does not feel hostile. I have always firmly believed that positivity promotes creativity, and allowing such a negative experience to influence the process did not allow others to feel that necessary positive environment. While it may be easy to point fingers, it is my job as the director to handle this concerns and move forward from them.

Perhaps the epitome of womanhood in the Victorian period, being seen and not heard, was encompassed with brilliance from Peterson as Annie. From seamlessly moving between rooms to a shy, understanding approach to speaking with other characters, Peterson created a maternal figure that others felt comfortable conversing with and perhaps most importantly, undressing in front of as well. Although helping in a medical sense, it can be uncomfortable to undress in front of someone else. This could be in regard to opposing genders, such as Leo, or just timid individuals, like Mrs. Daldry. Peterson’s approach created a loving, friendly individual who others felt they could share intimate moments with and get to know in a more personal way.

An area of strength Peterson possesses is connecting with her roles in a way that makes them believable and full of life on stage. Rather than seeing an actor, that character is clearly in front of you. One of the biggest challenges Peterson continues to grow through is not believing in herself. Rather than believing her choices, she often relied on
whether I felt she had done something “right” or “wrong”. This is an area that I encouraged her to work through, and I certainly hope that while she seeks the opinions of others, that she does not always need validation in her choices. She is an incredible smart actor and knows what she is doing, arguably more than se gives herself credit for.

Actor Lyreshia Ghostlon-Green is an exceptional performer who was always up to the challenge of trying new things. In many ways, I allowed my feelings of ineptitude get in the way of addressing the racial issues within this script and in turn, hindered growth for Ghostlon-Green throughout the production. This was at no fault of Ghostlon-Green’s, as she produced a believable character, but one that needed more direction to fully bloom. Ruhl very specifically lays out the idea that Elizabeth is a Black woman. The power struggle between races should be evident in this show, especially because Elizabeth often does not speak her mind in order to keep the peace and maintain her job. It is quite clear that Elizabeth has no control over her life. When her husband discovers Leo had painted her nursing the Givings’ daughter, he forbids her from going back to work for them. While I think my directorial approach delved into the clear discrepancies between men and women in this era, I think I let it overtake the clear racial power issues. One thing I need to continue working on is not fearing more than one concept and allowing myself to explore all of the big ideas from the playwright. In addition, I can no longer be afraid to ask questions to clarify racial issues I do not completely comprehend as a white individual. Instead, I should feel empowered to work with my racially diverse peers and
continue to do my own research to fully empower my performers and the show as a whole.

Leo is an anomaly in this play. Although he suffers from hysteria, he is not a female patient like most of the individuals Dr. Givings sees. This became a challenge; why does Leo exist in this show in a male role as opposed to a female role? It was through his connection to Catherine that this became clearer. He offers something to Catherine that her husband does not, time and connection. Lester’s natural sense of wanting to engage with others made Leo a relatable, believable character. It made sense that Catherine would believe she had fallen in love with Leo and want to leave with him. Lester portrayed this character with a flamboyance that made him clearly different from the other male characters. At the same time, it was clear that Lester understood the expectations of how men carried themselves in this period. For example, his interactions with Catherine when Dr. Givings was not around them. When the doctor would enter the room and Leo found himself in a rather compromising position with Catherine, although not intentional, he would attempt to clear it up. Lester captured the essence of an artist who is seeking to find and exemplify love in the world, both in his actions and in his art.

In conjunction with the actors, the design elements helped bring the rest of the concept to life. This team had a clear understanding of addressing the strict and suffocating nature of the Victorian Era without needing to go over the top. I felt that we all were able to create a collaborative environment that allowed each other to share ideas with the group without fear of judgment or being easily dismissed. Scenically, designer
John Paul captured the essence of clutter and feeling trapped without the use of a complete set. His use of the crown molding and doors without walls allowed me to work around the sight-lines I was concerned about while still allowing the actors to feel caged within the two rooms of the house, especially Catherine. This was exactly what I had hoped for in my initial discussions with the designers. In addition, I particularly appreciated that Paul and I were able to come to a consensus on having empty picture frames hung to create the illusion of a chaotically full house without seeing any of the actual art. From the beginning, I wanted us to feel a true emptiness of feeling, and this aided in that mission.

Although I feel I have grown in my time during my graduate degree training, an area where I still need to push myself further is asking for what the show needs. It was not until later in the process that I discovered we needed more entrances and exits into the spaces. In particular, we needed a way for characters to go to the nursery. This area was addressed, but I should have pushed for another entrance into the doctor’s office as well. There were many times where Annie’s character should have been coming from an inner desk area and could not because we did not have another entrance. Had I spoken up about this sooner, I know Paul would have acclimated the design and found a way to add another entrance. In doing so, cohesiveness also should have played a part. No three doors on the set were exactly the same; the front door was invisible, in order to address sight-line issues, the nursery door was one style, and the main office door was truly Victorian in nature. If I had to do it over again, I would have asked that we either just
have a hallway that led off into the nursery or that we made sure it looked less modern and more like that of the Victorian period. An area in the design overall that I want to keep in mind as I move forward in my career is cohesiveness, both in one area of design, but amongst all areas as a whole, too.

In reflection of the scenic design, the only other area where I would challenge myself to make better use of the space was the garden. I struggled immensely with blocking the final scene of the show in the garden. I was so worried about sight-lines that I moved the final moment center stage, but in doing so, I created other sight-line issues. Either I needed to trust my initial instincts and should have left the moment completely in the garden area, or I should have asked for a raised area that would make the actors more visible. Rather than second guessing myself, I should have brought my concerns to the design team to hear their possible solutions to the concerns. They were always willing to listen to me since I was able to help establish a welcoming and collaborative environment, and I should have trusted that they would help in this area. Moving forward, communication is something I need to trust in more. Knowing that I may not have all the answers is often a hard issue to come to terms with, but this production is just proof that it is OK to ask for help. I simply believe I needed to realize that much earlier in the process.

The costumes, designed by Parker Adams, worked effectively in creating the Victorian world of the play. Having worked with Adams before, I knew she would dedicate her time and efforts to finding pieces that were appropriate not only to the
period, but to the individual characters as well. One of the big challenges I offered her was to connecting all the characters in relationships one another. I thought this was beautifully done between Dr. Givings and Catherine. Both characters had tones of maroon throughout their costumes, and I loved how well they complimented one another. While Mr. and Mrs. Daldry also went together, I thought their connection was a little less successful. Perhaps this is because both characters were dressed in rather muted tones as compared to Dr. And Mrs. Givings. That said, the characters felt they were of the same world. No one stood out in a way that took away from anyone else or the scenic elements of the show. After meticulous timing, the pieces worked perfectly for a show that required the characters to continually take off and put on clothing. Adams was up to the challenge when it came to this monumental task.

Sound and lighting provided excellent emotional responses throughout the play. Sound designer Finley Alexander captured the essence of electricity through a variety of buzzes and hums used throughout the production. This heightened the importance of the scientific elements of the show, especially what was valuable to Dr. Givings. The recorded piano moments were beautifully done, especially considering this was not originally Alexander’s intention. It was clear that she took the time to play it with Rotty in order to get the timing correct and create the illusion the piano was actually played live. One area where I would change the design is pushing Alexander to find more moments of piano music. This becomes such an emotionally charged element for so many of the characters, and there are not many scripted moments with the piano played.
That said, incorporating more piano music, either in specific scene changes or even as underscored moments, would have tied the emotional heart of the piece together with the vibrating electrical components. In addition, more music throughout would have aided the musicality of Ruhl’s language in the piece. As I move forward in future productions, continually revisiting my initial intentions and evaluating whether the designs fit that will be pivotal. While those intentions may change, it is necessary to evaluate all moving pieces and how they evolve throughout the process as well.

Aria Smith’s lighting design reflected the necessary changes in the time of day throughout the production. In addition, the use of gobos allowed for the unique creation of a window that the audience could only see because of the lighting coming through into the house. Perhaps the most unique and challenging aspect of the lighting design was the use of four different practicals. Smith’s design emphasized the importance of electricity within the confines of the show’s world. I found Smith to be an extremely hardworking individual. Whenever I posed a hypothetical question, Smith was ready to implement it, even if it was temporary. When I shifted the location of the final moment shortly before we opened, Smith was able and willing to readjust the lighting instruments. Working with Smith allowed me to freely ask for particular moments in the design that allowed her to play. I firmly feel that we made each other stronger with each conversation and hope I can apply this to my future collaborations.

The technical direction by Delia Stoeckel and stage management by Glo Toupence were executed effectively. Stoeckel typically kept the team informed of the
build progress, though there were many meetings where it felt like the production was not
moving as quickly as necessary given the early production timing of the first studio show
of the season. In addition, an aspect that was necessary for the show was snow falling in
the final moments as the lights go out. Stoeckel’s advisor, George Grubb, was surprised
to learn that we wanted snow so close to the show opening. It was clear that this pivotal
moment had not been communicated, which I found quite alarming. Thankfully, this
element was a part of the show. In reflecting, it is clear that even if it seems that
everything is on track to move forward, I should verify with my team more frequently
throughout the process. As for Toupence’s experience as a stage manager, they were both
efficient and professional in their work. This was Toupence’s first time as a primary stage
manager, but I felt their previous experience as an assistant prepared them to take the
reigns. Toupence was always on top of sending out emails to the cast and production
team, even when they were out of the process for a time. I appreciated their dedication to
the process. One area where Toupence can continue to improve is cue-calling. This show
had quite a few calls, especially for the practical lighting. During rehearsals, the calls
varied from night to night. In particular, Toupence was relying on actor movements to
complete each call. The actors were not always consistent, so this was not completely all
on Toupence. By performances, however, these issues were corrected and Toupence kept
the production on a timely schedule.

The construction of props was absolutely vital for this production. Sofia Itskovich
had several large tasks ahead of her in creating and finding medical equipment that was
appropriate both for the production and for the period. While I was initially impressed with the thoughts brought to our production meetings, I did not feel the end result completely reflected those ideas. In reflecting, encouraging Itskovich to research more the looks of vibrators of the era would have been beneficial for a variety of reasons. While I felt there was some work done, I believe more could have been done in order to create a real world sense of these instruments. Rather than just taking a whisk and putting some rope on it, referencing Paul’s research and using it may have created a reality that was easier to connect with for both audiences and actors alike. It seemed too easy to laugh at the moments rather than allowing room for analysis in what was happening for these characters. This directly relates back to the consistency mentioned earlier. If the props had more readily reflected that time frame, the world itself would have been more believable.

Ultimately, this production had levels of successes and failures, which reflects directly back on my responsibility as director to guide the production team to meet their collaborative vision of the show. There were many opportunities for me to make adjustments to specific elements of the show that could have happened anywhere during the rehearsal process, even at the final dress rehearsals. The time constraints of this show became overwhelming at times, and I allowed that to cloud decisions that may have elevated the overall experience of the play. My insecurities cannot continue to get in the way of my role in the collaborative process. It is necessary to learn when to push for what the show needs and when to step back and let certain aspects go.
Directing *In the Next Room or the vibrator play* was an incredible learning experience. I believe the direction was successful in leaving the audience with a sense of understanding what it truly is to love another individual. Allowing themselves to analyze love on stage and really evaluate their own relationships and how they treat others they care for is a necessary component of witnessing this show. Through observation of the audience each night, it seemed clear that the humor was effective, and the sentimental moments had a lasting impact. Given the responses of several audience members, this production was successful. It allowed for a cathartic experience for not only audience members, but for cast, crew, and creative team as well.
Prior to admission in the Master of Fine Arts program at Minnesota State University, Mankato, my directorial experience was primarily in educational theatre settings. Most of these encounters involved working with high school students on their emerging acting skills. These opportunities developed my initial approaches to direction and shaping stories. It solidified my desire to work in a collegiate setting and to continue learning new skills and developing my own style of directing. This chapter will focus on the foundation established throughout my journey as a director and an analysis of how the projects, classes, assistantship duties, and other opportunities have further developed these skills.

While working with high school students, I focused heavily on basic acting skills. With a minor in theatre, I had a plethora of knowledge to pull from while working with these middle and high school individuals. I consistently urged them to explore new types of theatre and push their skills beyond one character type. While directing these plays, I was able to teach my students both on and off stage skills. These included but were not limited to building sets, scenic painting, proper theatre etiquette, and beginning acting techniques. In many ways, I learned just as much from the students as they learned from me. Perhaps one of the most important lessons I learned was using time efficiently,
especially in small school settings where participants were involved in more than one extracurricular. My experiences at two smaller schools, Groton Area High School in Groton, South Dakota and Loyola Catholic School in Mankato, Minnesota taught me the necessity for sticking to small budgets and understanding how to balance minimal rehearsal time while still being expected to produce quality productions. It also solidified the essential nature of fostering positive and lasting relationships and communicating the necessities of a given production.

Working with these younger actors afforded me the knowledge of bridging the gap between experience level at an early stage in my directorial career. I was privileged to work with many students who had a natural theatrical talent that was easy to foster and grow, while others were merely looking for a way to spend time with their friends. Both types of students are vital to creating art, but their approach to productions varies drastically. It also affects how the production is able to use its time and develop a quality production. There were many processes where missing actors affected the progress of a production, and I quickly adapted to manage my time more efficiently for when all students were in attendance.

My time at Minnesota State University, Mankato has offered a challenging and insightful process to achieving my Master of Fine Art. Many of these courses directly guided my choices for the production work of *In The Next Room or the vibrator play*. In particular, Advanced Directing Methods I and II allowed me to shape my own approaches to directing through new techniques. Vladimir Rovinsky’s Advanced Directing Methods
II offered a new and insightful approach to physicalizing the textual process of a play. I firmly felt that pushing us to perform an entire play in twenty minutes opened my eyes to the most important moments in a play. Staging William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* in such a short period of time forced me to acknowledge the key elements of the story. It was necessary that my message for the production was clear and concise and that each subsequent moment fit into the world we were creating. Applying this to my own shows was incredibly beneficial. In addition, physicalizing the emotions made my stories clearer and more influential. It allows the actors to more readily connect with the characters and therefore, allows the audience to more directly connect with those characters. These became especially relevant in my production of *The Wolves* by Sarah DeLappe, as I was directing it while simultaneously taking the class.

One of the most influential classes in Matthew Caron’s Directing Methods I directly related to the emerging field of intimacy choreography. While I already had knowledge of this important area of study, this provided the knowledge that a pursuit in intimacy was not only worthwhile, but entirely needed. This lined up nicely with the knowledge I gained after being awarded the Stage Choreographers and Directors Fellowship at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival in the spring of 2021. This fellowship awarded me the opportunity to learn from industry professionals and educators. Through this, I attended a workshop led by Theatrical Intimacy Education (TIE) co-founder, Chelsea Pace. It was a wonderful opportunity, and I diligently took notes and actively participated in the workshop. Evidently, Pace was impressed with my
dedication and awarded me the first Theatrical Intimacy Education Professional Development Fellowship. This allowed me the opportunity to attend several of TIE’s workshops, including gaining knowledge in trauma training, working on intimacy with minors, TIE’s boundary practice, and countless others. Through these sessions, I gained insight on the importance of aiding actors in knowing and understanding their boundaries and communicating what they are willing to attempt on stage.

Some of the most beneficial courses in developing my skills as a director were actually the Design for Directors courses. Knowing how to effectively communicate with designers is vital in moving a production forward towards achieving one main goal. Understanding concepts such as color theory, material texture, and qualities of sound are vital components that add to the telling of a story. Completing the sound design course allowed me the opportunity to not only direct *Slasher* by Allison Moore, but also to create the sound design for it. These courses ended up being some of the most interesting for me, and I discovered that I had areas of interest I was not aware of up to that point.

Scenic design and painting courses led me to discover a love of world building in a new way that aided my understanding of plays. This was also beneficial in directing plays at Loyola Catholic School while also attending school. Small schools often cannot afford to staff their theatre departments with more than one or two people, and Loyola is no exception. These courses have aided in designing these outside projects when a designer is unavailable.
Theatre Speech II offered many beneficial tools for directors, especially learning the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and proper stage speech. The vocal qualities learned in this course, as well as the proper techniques of enunciation and projection have aided me through several projects. Spaces like the Andreas Theatre can easily deaden the volume of the actors if they are not aware of these proper techniques. In addition, these are skills that I have used with my high school students and my Acting for Everyone classes. These concepts have aided in my acting coaching, especially in helping younger students differentiate characters from themselves.

In conjunction with Theatre Speech II, Stage Dialects I and II work on IPA and delve into commonly used dialects in theatre. These courses were incredibly helpful in directing projects Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief by Paula Vogel and In The Next Room, as they both involved dialect work. At the time of directing Desdemona, I had only learned one dialect. Employing a dialect coach was beneficial for the actors and me. In conjunction with these courses, I was able to create a foundation on which to continue learning in the future. IPA quickly turned into one of my favorite pieces of the course. Knowing and understanding IPA will allow me to work with actors in future projects, both for dialects on enunciation.

Working almost hand in hand with the intimacy choreography work I have undergone, Stage Combat proved vital to serve as a reminder to create a safe and predictable environment. In The Next Room involved a stage slap that I would not have known how to stage had I not simultaneously been in the course. When I was struggling
with the staging of this moment, instructor David McCarl was more than happy to offer some suggestions. Knowing that I had support and the skills necessary to offer my actors a safe environment was pivotal. The world of intimacy and stage combat have clear overlap. It is important that we discuss technique and prioritize safety for everyone in the room.

Advanced Acting Techniques offered me several tools to work with actors as a means to develop a variety of characters. The insightful nature of internalizing and physicalizing emotions was a new approach, as well as the idea of psychological centers and anthropomorphizing. Studying the movements of animals was enlightening in terms of embodying a specific tempo, style, and pattern. This is useful even when actors are portraying humans. I have relied on many of these concepts in working with actors, especially in productions where it is necessary for one person to play multiple characters.

Theatre History I and II allowed for a renewal in the importance of where we started and where we are going. While we may not be able to completely predict the future, analyzing our history is the only way that we can make changes and move forward in our world. It was necessary to critically analyze the many ways in which plays are written. In addition to knowing our own history, looking at other cultural theatres is equally vital. Learning about Japanese bunraku puppetry, for example, directly links to current theatrical productions, like The Lion King. These courses also encouraged graduate students to work on their teaching skills. Working with small groups and
grading undergraduate essays allowed graduate students the means to differentiate learning for a variety of student understanding.

With few courses offered solely to graduate students, Theatre Research and Theatre Theory and Criticism were vital to laying a foundational base for the program. I found myself drawn to researching topics related to female playwrights, plays, and concerns in the theatrical world. It was through these courses that I found my clear guiding path as a director. While I do not believe I will only tell female empowerment stories, I do think it is one of my clear passions. In addition, looking at the different theatrical philosophies aided in understanding the thought process towards producing specific productions. An open nature is necessary to create art, as no two people see the world in the same light.

My minor project, Desdemona: a play about a handkerchief, was enlightening for a variety of reasons. As a high school director, I was a one person department. I did not have anyone else to answer to in those cases. When I came to Minnesota State University, Mankato, that changed. Working with designers prompted the necessity for production meetings. This program offered my first opportunity to challenge my communication skills, as relaying my conceptual ideas to a design team is nothing I had experience with before. This is when I first learned the importance of speaking my mind and acknowledging that no two people communicate the same way.

Slasher, my major project, offered a variety of challenges. Although I was connected deeply to the horror tropes and the clear feminism within the play, I allowed...
my stubborn nature to get in the way of making changes in the process. When I noticed there were issues with the vision of the production, I should have stepped in and addressed them instead of allowing my pride to get in the way. This was a big lesson and one I incorporated in another project, The Wolves. When the play was lifeless and the pace was too slow, remembering this lesson allowed me to make necessary changes and acknowledge that it is okay, and sometimes even necessary, to change our directorial approach.

In addition to the directing projects required for the program, I also worked on several shows as the production stage manager. These included The Tempest by William Shakespeare, H.M.S. Pinafore by William Schwenck Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, The Complete History of America (Abridged) by Adam Long, Austin Tichenor, and Reed Martin, and Some Enchanted Evening by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. Each of these productions reinforced the differing methods of directorial approaches. In addition, they required managerial skills, a sense of timeliness, clear communication, and focused paperwork. A clear thorough line through these projects and so much of the coursework is this idea of clear communication.

As part of the Graduate Assistantship, working in the scene shop has provided me with opportunities to lead others in developing and growing their skills in using tools and building sets. Critical thinking is absolutely a skill set necessary for work in the shop. At any given time, I may be given a task that does not go according to plan. Perhaps we may not have the necessary length of material for a given set piece. Problem solving quickly
allows us to move forward with the process. The scene shop has also continued to develop my managerial skill sets. Overseeing undergraduate work in the shop allows students to continue learning and pushes me to act as an educator rather than simply doing everything myself. This means communication is absolutely vital. This has also proven helpful for work in the props department, as I often receive requests to find specific items for our productions.

In addition to working in the scene shop, I am an instructor for THEA 101, Acting for Everyone. This is a general elective course, typically taken by a variety of students with little or no background in theatrical studies. As such, my main goal for this course is to develop strong communication skills and a sense of confidence in these students. Teaching Theatre Speech also allowed me the opportunity to work with theatre majors. Teaching IPA, a topic I absolutely love, was a refreshing and new challenge. My educational background serves me well when it comes to teaching, and I find myself more motivated than ever to find employment in the collegiate level. It is easy for me to set clear objectives and come up with lesson plans that fit the period. Teaching is in many ways a form of acting, and I find that teaching this course refreshes those skills and requires me to assess my objectives and how they are being met in each lesson.

This program has offered me so many opportunities to grow my skills as a director and further my interests in other areas of the theatrical world. At the time of this writing, I have one final semester of credits to complete the degree. I firmly believe the
Master of Fine Arts program at Minnesota State University, Mankato has supplied me with the necessary skills to move forward with my academic and theatrical goals.
# APPENDIX A

## REHEARSAL SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week One</th>
<th>Monday, August 22</th>
<th>4:00 pm</th>
<th>Auditions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, August 23</td>
<td>6:35pm-10:00pm</td>
<td>Table Work: Introduction to Intimacy and the World of the Play</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, August 24</td>
<td>6:35pm-10:00pm</td>
<td>Block Act 1, Scene 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday, August 25</td>
<td>6:35pm-10:00pm</td>
<td>Block Act 1, Scene 2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday, August 26</td>
<td>6:35pm-10:00pm</td>
<td>Run Act 1</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week Two</th>
<th>Sunday, August 28</th>
<th>6:35pm-10:00pm</th>
<th>Block Act 2, Scene 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday, August 29</td>
<td>6:35pm-10:00pm</td>
<td>Block Act 2, Scene 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, August 30</td>
<td>6:35pm-10:00pm</td>
<td>Run Act 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, August 31</td>
<td>6:35pm-10:00pm</td>
<td>Work Scenes TBD</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday, September 1</td>
<td>6:35pm-10:00pm</td>
<td>Run Show</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday, September 2</td>
<td>6:35pm-10:00pm</td>
<td>Run Show</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week Three</th>
<th>Monday, September 5</th>
<th>6:35pm-10:00pm</th>
<th>OFF BOOK ACT 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, September 6</td>
<td>6:35pm-10:00pm</td>
<td>OFF BOOK ACT 2</td>
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<td>Wednesday, September 7</td>
<td>6:35pm-10:00pm</td>
<td>Work Scenes TBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday, September 8</td>
<td>6:35pm-10:00pm</td>
<td>Run Show</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday, September 9</td>
<td>6:35pm-10:00pm</td>
<td>Stop/Go Act 1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week Four</td>
<td>Sunday, September 11</td>
<td>6:35pm-10:00pm</td>
<td>Stop Go/ Act 2</td>
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<td>-----------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday, September 12</td>
<td>6:35pm-10:00pm</td>
<td>Run Show</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, September 13</td>
<td>6:35pm-10:00pm</td>
<td>Run Show</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, September 14</td>
<td>6:35pm-10:00pm</td>
<td>Work Scenes TBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday, September 15</td>
<td>6:35pm call; 7:00pm go</td>
<td>Light/Sound Tech.</td>
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<td>Friday, September 16</td>
<td>6:35pm call; 7:00pm go</td>
<td>1st Tech.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday, September 17</td>
<td>6:35pm call; 7:00pm go</td>
<td>2nd Tech.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week Five</th>
<th>Sunday, September 18</th>
<th>6:35pm call; 7:30pm go</th>
<th>1st Dress</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday, September 19</td>
<td>6:35pm call; 7:30pm go</td>
<td>2nd Dress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, September 20</td>
<td>6:35pm call; 7:30pm go</td>
<td>Majors Preview</td>
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<td>Wednesday, September 21</td>
<td>6:35pm call; 7:30pm go</td>
<td>Opening Night</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday, September 22</td>
<td>6:35pm call; 7:30pm go</td>
<td>2nd Performance</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday, September 23</td>
<td>6:35pm call; 7:30pm go</td>
<td>3rd Performance</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, September 24</td>
<td>6:35pm call; 7:30pm go</td>
<td>Closing Performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

POSTER

In the Next Room
By Sarah Ruhl

Sept. 21-24 2022
Andreas Theatre
Tickets: MSUTheatre.com | 507-389-6661

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY MANKATO
Director's Note

What happens when a young married couple who are blessed with a new daughter and the invention of a lifetime find themselves at odds with communicating their desires and needs?

In Sarah Ruhl's *In the Next Room or the vibrator play*, this question is at the core of the play. In a world that does not see women as more than objects, Catherine Givings is ready to break the mold. Her husband, Dr. Givings, has fallen in love with electricity. Rather than showering his new family with love, he shuts himself in the next room, always working on curing hysteria in patients.

As a mother and wife myself, Ruhl's work resonated with me deeply. After a recent diagnosis of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), it was chilling to me how the medical world still has so much farther to go in aiding uterus bearing individuals. Dr. Givings mainly treats hysteria, a blanket umbrella term — much like PCOS — that barely grazed the surface of serious problems individuals were suffering from.

My hope is that this play will make you think not only about how we can better treat one another and strive for growth, but that it will also beg you to evaluate your own relationships. How do you communicate your desires and needs with those that you love? How do you allow your relationships to fill the void of isolation we would otherwise feel without other humans?

-Sarah Belfrage Honerman

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Cast

Catherine Givings ............... Natalie Suarez
Mrs. Daldry ......................... Liza Rotty
Annie ............................... Faith Peterson
Elizabeth ..................... Lyreshia Ghoston-Green
Dr. Givings ................. Seth M. Honerman
Mr. Daldry .................. Chandler Rosengren
Leo Irving ..................... Joshua Lester

Production Staff

Sarah Belfrage Honerman
Director

Glo Toupence
Production Stage Manager

John David Paul
Scenic Design

Parker Adams
Costume Design

Aria Smith
Lighting Design

Finley Alexander
Sound Design

Delia Stoeckel
Technical Direction

Reina M. Beisell
Assistant Stage Manager

Sofia Itskovich
Properties Master

Bailey Kowarsch
Lightboard Operator

Courtney Hansen
Soundboard Operator

John David Paul
Vladimir Rovinsky
Faculty Advisors

Nicole Dagget
House Manager

Lainey Gregorson
Original Poster Artwork

Setting

Upstate New York
Turn of the century,
Dawn of the age of electricity

*In the Next Room* is produced by special arrangements with Concord Theatricals
250 W. 57th Street, 6th Floor
New York, NY 10107

An Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity University. This document is available in alternate formats to individuals with disabilities by calling the Department of Theatre and Dance at 507-389-6863 (T), 800-627-3529 or TTY (MN/TTY).
APPENDIX C

PROGRAM

2022 - 2023 Mainstage Season

Disney’s IlleS School Musical
Sept. 29-Oct. 1 & Oct. 6-9, 2022

Richard III
Oct. 23-25 & 26-30, 2022

A Christmas Carol
Made possible by Mayo Clinic Health System
Nov. 3-5 & 10-13, 2022

Marisol
Feb. 15-18 & 23-26, 2023

Sorcerers Rotten
Made possible by Community Bank Mankato
and ones Law Office
April 7-9 & 13-16, 2023

Studio Season
In the Next Room
Sept. 21-24, 2022

Last Summer at Bluefish Cove
Nov. 16-19, 2022

At Home at the Zoo
March 1-4, 2023

The Language Archives
April 19-22, 2023

Dance Concerts
Fall Dance Concert
Dec. 1-3, 2022

Spring Dance Concert
April 27-29, 2023

Theatre and Dance Faculty and Staff

Scott Matthew Anderson
Costumer

Matthew Caron
Managing Director

Corrie Eggimann
Public Relations Director

George E. Grubb
Technical Director/Sound Design

Beverly Gruenzner Kragn
Business/Office Manager

Heather E. Hamilton
Acting and Directing

Julie Kerr-Berry
Chair, Department of
Theatre and Dance

David McCar
Costume Design

John David Paul
Scene Design

Vladimir Rovinsky
Acting and Movement

Steven Smith
Lighting Design

Daniel Stark
Director of Dance

Nicholas Wayne
Musical Director

In the Next Room
by Sarah Ruhl

Sept. 21 - 24, 2022
Andreas Theatre
Leo (Joshua Lester) points out the windows of light from electric lamps across the road to Catherine (Natalie Suarez).
(Photograph by Corrie Eggimann).
Leo (Joshua Lester) and Catherine (Natalie Suarez) discuss electricity over tea while Dr. Givings (Seth M. Honerman) administers pelvic massage to Mrs. Daldry (Liza Rotty) with the aid of his nurse Annie (Faith Peterson).
Catherine (Natalie Suarez) and Mrs. Daldry (Liza Rotty) inquire about the varying sensations experienced with Dr. Givings machine. Elizabeth (Lyreshia Ghostlor-Green) attempts to answer their questions.
Elizabeth (Lyreshia Ghostlon-Green) finally expresses her turmoil of losing her child with Catherine (Natalie Suarez).
(Photograph by Corrie Eggimann).
Annie (Faith Peterson) aids Mrs. Daldry (Liza Rotty) in redressing after a successful therapy session and Greek lesson. (Photograph by Corrie Eggimann).
Catherine (Natalie Suarez) stops Mr. Daldry (Chandler Rosengren) from kissing her in a moment of weakness.
(Photograph by Corrie Eggimann).
Mr. Daldry (Seth M. Honeman) and Catherine (Natalie Suarez) finally embrace and connect in their love for one another. (Photograph by Corrie Eggimann).
### APPENDIX E

### INTIMACY BREAKDOWN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moments of Intimacy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Page 17-19</strong></td>
<td><strong>Act 1, Scene 1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Page 24</strong></td>
<td><strong>Act 1, Scene 1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Page 25-26</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Page 30-31</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Page 35-36</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Page 40-41</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Page 45-46</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Page 48</strong></td>
<td><strong>Act 2, Scene 1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Page 52-53</strong></td>
<td><strong>Act 2, Scene 1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Page 57-60</strong></td>
<td><strong>Act 2, Scene 1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Page 62</strong></td>
<td><strong>Act 2, Scene 1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Page 64-66</strong></td>
<td><strong>Act 2, Scene 2</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Page 67</strong></td>
<td><strong>Act 2, Scene 2</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Page 73</strong></td>
<td><strong>Act 2, Scene 2</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Page 73-75</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Page 78</strong></td>
<td><strong>Act 2, Scene 2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Page 82</strong></td>
<td><strong>Act 2, Scene 2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Page 82</strong></td>
<td><strong>Act 2, Scene 2</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Page 84</strong></td>
<td><strong>Act 2, Scene 2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Page 85-86</strong></td>
<td><strong>Act 2, Scene 2</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX F

IN THE NEXT ROOM 2022 ERRATA

p. 21
CUT:

MRS. GIVINGS. It’s only that they say morality goes right through the milk.

Mrs. Evans said just the other day, oh I wouldn’t use a darkie, the morality goes right through the milk. But in the South, I don’t know what they do in the South —

MR. DALDRY. Elizabeth our housekeeper is colored but she is very moral, very Christian. She goes to church every week with Mrs. Daldry who is a very devout woman.

p. 22
CUT:

MRS. GIVINGS. Darling, I don’t know about a —

DR. GIVINGS. My father was a well-known abolitionist, Mr. Daldry. MR. DALDRY. I believe I’ve heard of him, William Givings. —

DR. GIVINGS. Yes. (to Mrs. Givings) You’d rather have a Negro protestant than an Irish Catholic, wouldn’t you?
Works Cited


McNulty, Charles. “Theater Review; This Dr. Feelgood has ‘em buzzing; Sarah Ruhl’s ‘In the Next Room’ is a rule-busting pleasure, even if it does end clumsily.” *Los Angeles Times*, 06 February 2009, pp. E1.


Ruhl, Sarah. *In The Next Room or the vibrator play*. New York, Theatre Communications Group, 2010.


Works Consulted


Royce, Graydon. “‘In the Next Room’ produces a warm buzz: Sarah Ruhl’s play about the invention of the vibrator tweaks technology’s inadequacies in curing heartache. Director Sarah Rasmussen’s wonderfully wrought production blossoms on the Jungle Theater stage.” *Star Tribune*, 05 November 2012, pp. E2.


Schupmann, Melinda. “In the Next Room or the Vibrator Play.” *Back Stage*, 14 October 2010, pp. 41.

Sheward, David. “In the Next Room or the Vibrator Play.” *Back Stage*, 26 November 2009, pp. 22.
