

5-2012

Playing Ann in Arthur Miller's All My Sons: One Actress' Approach in Creating a Role

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PLAYING ANN IN ARTHUR MILLER'S *ALL MY SONS*:
ONE ACTRESS' APPROACH IN CREATING A ROLE

PLAYING ANN IN ARTHUR MILLER'S *ALL MY SONS*:
ONE ACTRESS' APPROACH IN CREATING A ROLE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Drama

By

Abbey Jo Molyneux
University of Arkansas
Bachelor of Arts in Drama, 2006

May 2012
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ABSTRACT

The intent of this thesis, *Playing Ann in Arthur Miller's All My Sons: One Actress' Approach in Creating a Role*, is to document the research, analysis, and personal journey that informed the rehearsal and production processes in my portrayal as the character in the aforementioned title. This thesis includes the following five chapters: Script Analysis, Character Analysis, Created Materials, Reflections on the Audition, Rehearsal, and Production Processes, and A Summation of the Creative Process. *All My Sons* by Arthur Miller was produced by the University of Arkansas in the University Theatre February 1-10, 2008, and directed by Michael Landman.

This thesis is approved for recommendation
to the Graduate Council.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to the faculty and staff in the Department of Drama at the University of Arkansas for their continued inspiration and support; in particular, to Dr. Andrew Gibbs, Patricia Martin, and Michael Landman for their tireless efforts in helping with the completion of this thesis.

Also, special thanks to the staff of the University of Arkansas Graduate School for their help with this thesis.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to William for his support and Tim Sanders for his generosity and motivation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION/THESIS STATEMENT	1
A.	Play Synopsis	1
II.	MASTER'S THESIS	2
A.	Script Analysis	2
1.	Given Circumstances	2
2.	Meaning of the Title and Theme	5
3.	Initial, Central and Main Events	7
B.	Character Analysis	8
1.	What is Said About Ann	8
2.	Relevance of the Name, Ann Deever	11
3.	Purpose of Ann	12
4.	Ann's Preferences	12
5.	Ann's Use of Language	14
6.	Super-objective, Catalyst Moments and Objectives	14
7.	Ann's Overall Journey	16
C.	Created Materials	17
1.	Biographical and Directorial Concept Material	17
2.	Influences and Inspirations in Creating the Role	29
D.	Reflections on the Audition, Rehearsal and Production Processes	31
E.	A Summation of the Creative Process	58
III.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	59

I. INTRODUCTION/THESIS STATEMENT

This thesis is an attempt to document the creative process acquired while attending the Master of Fine Arts Program in Acting at the University of Arkansas and its application in the portrayal of Ann Deever in Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, produced by the University in the University Theatre February 1-10, 2008, and directed by Michael Landman. Documentation includes: script and character analyses, created biographical materials, created material relevant to the directorial concept, influences and inspirations in creating the role, reflections on the audition, rehearsal, and production processes, and a brief summation of the creative process.

All My Sons is a play about the complexity of morality. Specifically, the play addresses the conflict between individual and social responsibilities concerning World War II profiteering.

A. PLAY SYNOPSIS

Joe Keller, the father of Ann's deceased lover and potential, future father-in-law, owns a manufacturing plant responsible for shipping faulty aircraft parts to the United States Army Air Force, causing the deaths of twenty-one pilots. Conflict arises as Keller denies any knowledge of the incident, placing the blame solely on Ann's father, Steve Deever, who is serving the sentence for this crime throughout the play; however, both were arrested initially. Unbeknownst to all but Ann until Act Three, Larry Keller, Ann's deceased lover, purposely crashed his plane and killed himself when he heard that his father had been involved in the crime. Months later, Joe was exonerated while Steve remained in jail. At the beginning of the play, Ann, her brother George, and Chris Keller, Ann's soon-to-be fiancé and Larry's older brother, all believe Joe is innocent and Steve is guilty. Ann arrives at the Keller's eager to accept Chris' proposal but finds Kate, Larry and Chris' mother, to be harshly unreceptive to the idea. According to Kate, if Chris asks Ann to marry him, they are all declaring Larry's death, something she is unwilling or unable

to do at this point. Act Two brings the arrival of George and his new-found accusation that Joe pretended to be sick the day he ordered their father to ship the parts. George demands that Ann leave with him, and Chris and Ann respond by demanding he leave alone. Finally, because of George's vehement accusation, Joe admits to ordering Steve to ship the faulty parts in an effort to save his family by way of preserving his contract with the U.S. Army Air Force at any cost. After hearing the contents of Larry's letter, Chris' utter disgust at his father's lack of social conscience leads him to insist that Joe turn himself in to the authorities. Joe agrees but, instead, goes inside and shoots himself—seemingly indicating the impossibility of bearing the guilt.

The clash between familial loyalty and societal responsibility is the driving force propelling these characters toward tragedy. Each character in this play is directly or indirectly affected by this clash.

II. MASTER'S THESIS

A. SCRIPT ANALYSIS

Given Circumstances

In his stage directions at the top of Act One, Arthur Miller establishes that this play takes place in “the back yard of the Keller home in the outskirts of an American town” (5). Late in Act One it is established that the train station is in Columbus. Miller has written that his inspiration for *All My Sons* came from gossip his former mother-in-law shared about a young woman in Ohio who turned her father in after the war for selling faulty aircraft parts to the army. Growing up in the Midwest, I can immediately connect with Ann's love for her small-town childhood memories and her deep affection for the neighborhood: “It's lovely here. The air is sweet” (Miller 29).

Also, the sweltering heat of a sunny August day in Ohio is something with which I am very familiar. Besides Miller's opening stage directions indicating that it is a sunny day in August, he also provides intermittent dialogue referring to the heat: Kate's "It's suffocating upstairs" (35), Ann's "Will you have a cold drink?" (37), and Jim's, "Oh, it's too hot to drive" (43).

Regarding the date, although Miller specifically refers to the month, season, and time of day in his stage directions (August, summer, and Sunday morning, that evening, and two o'clock the next morning for each act, respectively), he never states the year. Instead he uses the phrase "of our era" to place the action (Miller 5). In order to determine the current year, one must work retroactively based on the information provided in the text. Chris says of Larry, "Nobody comes back after three years" (13); Joes says of Chris and Ann, "You haven't seen her since you went to war. It's five years" (15); Kate says of Ann, "She's been in New York three and half years," (19); and Ann says to Chris, "I almost got married two years ago" but didn't because "you started to write to me" (30). Taking all of that into account, and our decision that Chris begins writing Ann after he returns home from the war, the director and cast came to the conclusion that the year is the same as the year it received its first production, 1947.

The demands of World War II shifted the role of women in America. The majority of able-bodied young men were fighting overseas, causing a shortage of workers in many different industries. It was logical for women to leave the home, where typically they had been stationed, and assume the primary bread-winner role in place of their husbands. Although Ann did not lose her husband to the war, she did lose several loved ones in varying degrees over a brief span of time: her fiancé, who died in a plane crash (self-induced); her brother, who was drafted into the war; and her father, who was arrested and is serving a jail sentence for criminal war-time

profiteering. A salaried position outside the home became mandatory for Ann and her mother's survival.

Advertisements from 1943 editions of *Life Magazine* were the most effective inspiration for understanding the social and political climate on the home front. Pictures of women dressed in their best, with hair and make-up meticulously set, exclaiming slogans such as "Your American duty...to keep well and keep working," "Three cheers for you, Mrs. America, and all the things you're doing at home to help win the war," "She's serving by working at a war job. A man's job!—but she's the *real* All-American girl," were vital in helping me grasp the ideal balance of beauty and strength for Ann. Also, Norman Rockwell's iconic *Rosie the Riveter* painting, in its simplicity, spoke volumes about the attitude of women during the war. From the text it is obvious that Ann is not a sheltered, naïve little girl. Researching the war era and its effect on women's roles provided insight for the ways in which Ann would have been forced to grow given the circumstances.

Religiously, Miller references faith in God in the character of Kate but set these events on a Sunday in which none of the other characters, including Kate, ever mention attending or missing church. It is unclear which religion Kate follows given her limited dialogue on the subject. The lack of a strong belief system could account for the unwillingness of some characters to forgive themselves and others. Given the location in Middle America, it would seem logical that they are in a Protestant or Catholic environment. However, the guilt they cannot shake and so willingly place on others is evidence that the forgiveness central to Christianity is not a major factor in any of their life philosophies.

Meaning of the Title and Theme

The theme of the play and the meaning of the title are entwined. Thematically, in this play Miller explores individual versus social responsibility and the repercussions of each over time. The title, *All My Sons*, is a reference to the twenty-one pilots who lost their lives as a result of the faulty cylinder heads shipped from Joe Keller's shop. Miller gives him these words late in Act Three when finally he is face-to-face with the issue of his culpability: "Sure, he was my son. But I think to him they were all my sons. And I guess they were, I guess they were" (68). Keller finally, albeit reluctantly, admits his guilt in this crime after reading Larry's letter; prior to this moment, justification for his actions was all he could offer up, "a hundred and twenty cracked, you're out of business [. . .] You lay forty years into a business and they knock you out in five minutes, what could I do, let them take forty years, let them take my life away" (Miller 58). His admission is devoid of responsibility for the fallen soldiers but replete with responsibility for his livelihood, including his family. Chris, in response to Joe's plea that he did it all to give Chris a good life, turns the issue of responsibility from the individual to humanity, "For me! I was dying every day and you were killing my boys and you did it for me? [. . .] Don't you live in the world? [. . .] You're not even an animal, no animal kills his own" (59). The two stand on opposite sides of the proverbial fence fighting for what is most important: Joe, his family, and Chris, society/humanity. Each man's stance in the past seeks reckoning now. Joe must admit his shared guilt in the crime that rests solely on Ann's father, and Chris must ensure his father pays for his crime. Christopher Bigsby, in his book *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study*, states that this play is "in part about the individual's responsibility for his own actions and in part about the obligations he has to society. The crime at its centre raises in stark form the clash between self-

interest and human solidarity” (78). In life, both principles are alluring, vital and at war with one another.

Also, important to note in exploring the theme of individual versus social responsibility, Miller does not define the more righteous of the two. Each has flaws. Joe’s guilt is more obvious than Chris’: sacrificing human lives to secure his family’s future; however, Chris’ idealism is shown to be detrimental, as well. The Bayliss’ marriage (neighbors to the Kellers) is adversely affected as evidenced by Sue’s argument with Ann early in Act Two: “Every time he has a session with Chris he feels as though he’s compromising by not giving up everything for research. [. . .] He’s driving my husband crazy with that phony idealism of his, and I’m at the end of my rope on it” (Miller 38). Additionally, Chris’ hard-line idealism makes it impossible for him to “see it human,” as Joe puts it, and instead of offering compassion or forgiveness to a father who committed his life to providing the best he could for his family, he is prepared to drive Joe to jail himself (28). Right or wrong, it is this idealism which ultimately drives Joe to suicide. Terry Otten succinctly characterizes Miller’s thematic complexities in his book, *The Temptation of Innocence in the Dramas of Arthur Miller*: “For Miller, the only evil greater than an act of evil itself is the claim of innocence that allows for self-deception to camouflage the potential for evil in one’s self—yet, paradoxically, the attempt to find the moral center, however fated to end in ambiguity, is the ennobling principle in Miller’s heroes” (24-25). True to this statement, *All My Sons* ends in uncertainty; there is no clear victor.

Atonement for the sins of the past is also heavily explored in this play. In light of the aforementioned dual responsibilities which Benjamin Nelson describes as a pair of concentric circles spinning into coalescence in his book, *Arthur Miller: Portrait of a Playwright* (the inner

circle encompassing an individual's family and the outer containing all of humanity), he deduces that perceived atonement can compel one toward a false innocence:

Because Joe views his act as private, he is able to rationalize it in two ways. He can accept the lie that he never gave his partner the order to ship out the parts as necessary for the preservation of his family—an end which justifies any means for Joe. He can also visualize a wonderfully simple atonement. He will give Deever a job with the firm as soon as he is released; through his connections he will establish the man's son in a career; and finally he will take the daughter into his own family, thus making his partner's grandchildren heirs to the Keller legacy. A most reasonable and generous restoration. The consideration that atonement for twenty-one deaths is not quite as simple does not cross Joe's mind because they belong to the outer circle, which is still bewilderingly out of focus. (84)

Consequently, it seems that balance between the self-serving and self-sacrificing lifestyles may be what Miller is hoping to reveal, although it remains unclear whether any of the characters achieve this realization in the end.

Initial, Central and Main Events

The initial event of the play, the one event which occurs before the play begins and affects every character in the play, is Ann's arrival at the Keller's. The Kellers have successfully recreated a stasis in their neighborhood rivaling their pre-trial life. Ann's presence threatens this stasis for all but Chris, who either has no knowledge of his parents' guilt or has suppressed it so deeply it has no interference. Ann is like the past walking back into their yard. They cannot help but deal with it.

The central event, defined as the moment two forces collide and one proves stronger, occurs when Joe succumbs to Chris' questioning and admits his fault in shipping faulty aircraft cylinder heads. Ann's presence initiated the churning of the past, but her brother's presence created the upheaval of details long buried which caused Kate and Joe's inadvertent slip in recalling the day the cylinder heads were shipped out. Witnessing his parents fumble, Chris launches a line of questioning that leads Joe to his admission.

The main event, the last event in the play which affects every person, is Keller's suicide. Ann is directly linked to this outcome because she brings Larry's letter, which becomes Chris' basis for demanding his father turn himself in. After reading Larry's words himself, Joe complies and heads in for his jacket, but contemplating the moral issue, proceeds to shoot himself instead. As the actor playing Ann, the thought never occurs to me that revealing this letter will lead to anyone's death. In fact, the opposite is thought to be the outcome: that revealing it will lead to life for those clinging to a hope that is dead.

B. CHARACTER ANALYSIS

What is Said About Ann

Miller's description of Ann as she is first introduced to the story is as follows: "Ann is twenty-six, gentle but despite herself capable of holding fast to what she knows" (21). The dialogue he wrote for her fits that description perfectly. Although her speech in Acts One and Two are peppered with diminishing phrases like "I don't know," "I think," and "I guess," she manages to directly defy Kate's insistence that she is still waiting for Larry to return just moments after her arrival in the back yard. Unlike Chris, Ann never falters on this point. Making declarations about things of which she is certain proves no obstacle for her. Of her guilty father she declares, "I don't write to him [. . .] I've never written to him [. . .] It's wrong to

pity a man (who) [. . .] knowingly shipped out parts that would crash an airplane” (Miller 27). Even in the face of the Kellers’ objections, she never relinquishes her belief that a terrible crime has been committed. She does, however, side-step the issue with, “Joe, let’s forget it,” and her reprimand of Chris, “Don’t yell at him. He just wants everybody happy,” which softens the situation (8).

She describes herself as not being very good in an argument, but from the text this does not appear to be true. She holds her own with Kate, Sue, George, Joe, and even Chris. A more accurate description may be that she avoids arguments and tries to resolve them as quickly and peaceably as possible, but she proves time and again that she can speak her mind without being shaken. In addition to easing the tension with Joe and Chris as described above, she tells Sue, “Please, I don’t want to argue,” and handles George with gentleness in the face of his outrage with, “Sit down, dear. Don’t be angry, what’s the matter” (Miller 38,45). In the same scene with both Sue and George, though, Ann demonstrates extreme courage of her convictions. She believes so strongly in Chris that she tells a complete stranger, Sue, she “resents everything” she said about him and doesn’t hesitate to hurl, “That’s not true!” and “That’s a lie” directly at her (38). Her own brother, with whom it is demonstrated she shares a great deal of affection, is not able to sway her from her beliefs; she demands that he leave the Keller’s. Even in Act Three with Kate, when Ann exerts her strength most forcefully, it is tempered by the gentleness Miller described. She willfully chooses to destroy Kate by revealing Larry’s letter, but infuses her attack with a tenderness that is in direct opposition to her action: “I’m not trying to hurt you, Kate [. . .] You’re making me do this [. . .] I’ve been so lonely, Kate. . . I can’t leave here alone again [. . .] I told you a hundred times, why wouldn’t you believe me! [. . .] Kate, dear, I’m so sorry. . . I’m so sorry” (65). Miller’s choice to imbue this all-knowing character with gentleness

makes it more probable that the audience will not see her as a one-dimensional, evil character who ruthlessly withholds information only to reveal it at the most opportune time with the intent to destroy.

The other characters' dialogue in the play reveals much about Ann's character and physical appearance. Ann's beauty is remarked at by almost every character in the play. Knowing that she cares about her appearance informed me that she is mindful of how others perceive her. This carries over into her character. She tempers her strength with gentleness to protect the feelings of others; again, she is mindful of their perception of her.

Kate describes her as being "a sensitive girl" (Miller 26). Evidence of that sensitivity is present when Ann says she doesn't want to run into any of the neighbors on the street if they still talk about the case. Also, when Sue reveals the neighbors all believe "Joe pulled a fast one to get out of jail," it unnerves Ann to the point of an outburst at Chris for his assurance that it has all been forgotten (38).

George describes her as "not the kind of girl who can live with that," referring to Joe's involvement with the deaths of the pilots (Miller 47). She supports this notion when she tells Chris, "I know how much you love him, but it could never. . ." referring again to the possibility of Joe's guilt and its effect on the possibility of their future together (39).

Ann is treated like a child by most of the primary players in the story. She is told what she knows and doesn't know and what she will or will not do. Beginning with Kate telling her, "Deep, deep in your heart you've always been waiting for him [. . .] Ann, you know I'm right," to Joe insisting, "She dasn't [sic] feel that way," when I inform him of my belief that my father could be guilty of Larry's death, too (Miller 24, 28). George arrives on the scene and commands Ann not to marry Chris and to leave with him tonight. He tells her she doesn't know what really

happened concerning their father and also that she knows Joe is actually the guilty party and not their father. Chris chimes in, declaring Ann will not be leaving and “nobody can tell her to go,” but moments later demands of her, “You’d better answer him, Annie. Answer him” (56). The tolerance displayed by this seemingly strong character is perplexing, but seems most effectively justified by two things: the security she gains from being cared for so deeply by so many and the secret power she possesses in Larry’s letter.

The tolerance is non-existent in Act Three, however. The diminishing phrases disappear from Ann’s speech, and now she, instead of others, fires off a list of what she will and won’t do and makes clear demands of the Kellers.

Relevance of the Name, Ann Deever

Ann means “grace” or “favor,” and in *All My Sons* she is indeed graced with knowledge to which no other character in the play is privy. Additionally, grace can refer to charm, beauty, and refinement while favor is synonymous with esteem, honor, and respect. In the play, Ann is referred to as being beautiful, pretty, a knockout and is highly esteemed by the Keller household as evidenced by their hospitality and joviality at her arrival. The meaning of the name Miller chose for this character reflects exactly the kind of traits he penned for her.

Regarding her last name, Deever, little can be proven; however, Rudyard Kipling wrote a poem in the early twentieth century called “Danny Deever” about a soldier who is hung for killing another soldier in his sleep. Whether or not Miller ever read this poem is unknowable, but it seems oddly coincidental that the Deever name was associated with a man guilty of murdering an unsuspecting soldier not 60 years prior to this extremely literate author’s creation.

Purpose of Ann

This play does not exist without the character of Ann. Without Ann's arrival, the Keller's lives would continue as they have, in a peaceful bubble of denial. All three Kellers have successfully reconciled the past with their present. They are thriving in their present reality. It is not until Ann arrives that Chris musters the courage to confront his parents about their delusional existence. In this way, Ann is like the messenger in a Greek tragedy: she brings the conflict to the surface; she is the knowledge-bearer.

Ann's Preferences

It is clear from the amount she spent on it, "three weeks' salary," that quality dresses are something Ann enjoys (Miller 21). Within the first few minutes of her arrival in the back yard, she makes mention that Chris has "sure gone in for clothes" and inquires about Frank's "haberdashering," both references to her love for fashion (22, 25). This informed my decision to make her an employee of Macy's during her time in New York. She also remembers with fondness their time at the lakeshore and wishes to relive the experience tonight (22). As a result, a love of partying, dancing, and laughing are all logical inferences for Ann's personality. She remarks, "Gosh, it's wonderful to hear you laughing about it," when Joe and Kate describe the neighborhood reception they now enjoy (26). The fact that she likes to laugh and avoid conflict go hand-in-hand with the description of gentleness Miller ascribed to her. She describes Chris' love of his parents as "a good thing" (29). She loves the Keller's back yard: "It's lovely here. The air is sweet" (29). Her love for her hometown makes her fight to regain the security she once had here even stronger.

The fact that she does not like confrontation threatens to trump her love for her hometown, though. Early in Act One she exposes her fear of coming face-to-face with anyone

who might want to treat her as Mrs. Hammond did. Early in Act One, Ann recounts the experience of their neighbor, Mrs. Hammond, standing in the Deever's yard yelling "Murderers" shortly after Ann's father was incarcerated. The incident scarred her. She starts to tell Chris that she could never live here with him if Joe is guilty, but gets cut off before finishing her thought. Also, as described earlier, she tries to deflate any conflict she comes into contact with as gracefully as she is able. Her declaration that she is "not very good in an argument," seems to reflect the fact that she does not like them and avoids them at all costs (32).

She loves Chris' honesty and tells Sue that it relaxes her (Miller 37). Dishonesty is something she loathes, "I can't stand scheming" (36). She speaks of lying with great contempt: concerning her father's ability to lie, of which she reminds George; Sue's accusation that Joe is guilty and everyone knows it, which Ann calls a lie; and her rebuff of Chris' assurance that the neighborhood has forgotten the whole thing, "I just don't understand why you took the trouble to deny it" (39).

She hates that Chris carries guilt about profiting from the war and about what it will do to Kate when they tell her their plan to wed. To rid Chris of any guilt he may have about marrying her is one of the reasons why revealing the letter becomes necessary. Kate refuses to relinquish the control she has over Chris' guilt concerning Larry and Ann right up to the last minute before the letter is revealed: "My dear, if the boy was dead, it wouldn't depend on my words to make Chris know it. . . . The night he gets into your bed, his heart will dry up. Because he knows and you know. To his dying day he'll wait for his brother" (Miller 64). It is those words from Kate that send Ann into the final battle wielding Larry's letter as her weapon. Chris' guilt could destroy their happiness together, and Kate has the power to remove it by declaring Larry's death.

Ann's Use of Language

Ann's language is very straightforward, earnest in quality, and factual. She says what she means and means what she says. In the beginning, she demonstrates her humility at the Keller household by resorting to acquiescent language and gently probing questions. However, when presented with a lie or direct hostility, her frank strength rises up without hesitation.

Likewise, in Act Three, there is no equivocation with Kate. In Ann's pursuit for a life with Chris, Kate is her biggest obstacle. The letter is to Ann what the atomic bomb was to the U.S. in WWII: excessively destructive, but necessary to win. After the decision has been made to use its power, execution of the plan is of utmost importance. Her speech becomes primarily declarative, while retaining the ring of earnest honesty employed throughout the play.

She frequently recalls the past to support whatever statement she is making about the future. For instance, in Act One with the Kellers and Act Two with George, she references the wonderful times they used to have at the lakeshore to motivate them to go tonight to celebrate her and Chris' engagement. She re-tells the story of Mrs. Hammond's display of hatred in front of their home to emphasize how important it is to her that she not be faced with that degradation and humiliation again. Most powerfully, though, she brings to light the effect Joe's guilt had on Larry in order to secure her future with Chris. Her recollection of the past is so tangible that it seems her wounds have not healed yet, making it all the more urgent for her to find solace with Chris.

Super-objective, Catalyst Moments and Objectives

Ann's super-objective is a deep desire for security, which includes stability, a family and a home. These things were robbed from her the day her father was incarcerated. The catalyst moment (being defined as the moment the character begins needing what he or she needs from

the other characters in the scene) for Ann's arrival is Chris' first letter. Throughout the entire correspondence Ann needs the security a life with him will provide.

Act One, (Ann's) Scene One

Ann needs signs from each of the Kellers that they are in support of her marrying Chris.

Catalyst Moment: When Chris asks Ann to come to his home.

Act One, Scene Two

Ann needs Chris to ask her to marry him.

Catalyst Moment: When Kate tells Ann she knows she's still waiting for Larry.

Act One, Scene Three

Ann needs to rid George of his hostility toward the Kellers.

Catalyst Moment: When Ann hears the tone of his first word to her.

Act Two, Scene One

Ann needs Chris to commit to telling Kate they're getting married tonight.

Catalyst Moment: Kate's departure immediately following Ann's arrival on the porch.

Act Two, Scene Two

Ann needs to win Sue over.

Catalyst Moment: Sue's entry into the Keller's yard, their first meeting; but originally from Chris' first mention of Dr. Bayliss and Sue in his letters.

Act Two, Scene Three

Ann needs the truth from Chris.

Catalyst Moment: When Sue tells her everyone in the neighborhood believes Joe is guilty.

Act Two, Scene Four

Ann needs Joe's alliance in their fight against Kate.

Catalyst Moment: When Joe asks Ann how it feels to be a married woman.

Act Two, Scene Five

Ann needs George to release his vendetta against Joe.

Catalyst Moment: Their telephone conversation earlier that day.

Act Three, Scene One

Ann needs Joe to leave the yard. Ann needs Kate to admit Larry is dead.

Catalyst Moment: That morning, when Kate tells Ann she knows Larry is still alive.

Act Three, Scene Two

Ann needs Chris to leave with her tonight. Ann needs Joe and Kate to let them leave in peace.

Ann's Overall Journey

Chris Keller has been described as coming "back from the war to a family concerned primarily with its own future and the business of making money, a society in which his neighbours, too, seem to have put idealism aside in the name of a post-war pragmatism" (Bigsby 79). Ann's journey is a similar one: she, too, eventually discards her idealistic notion of an unstained life as Mrs. Chris Keller and compromises her morals to, as Miller puts it, "do nothing about Joe" while continuing her original pursuit to marry (64). Her idealism is exchanged for pragmatism in the face of adversity. To uphold her Act One implication, that marrying into the Keller family would not be possible if Joe is guilty, would shatter her dream of the ideal life with Chris; thus, she sacrifices her moral integrity for self-preservation. Like Jim says about Chris in Act Three, Ann's star of honesty goes out when she chooses to ignore Joe's crime and continue the chase for her dream.

C. CREATED MATERIALS

Biographical and Directorial Concept Material

At the suggestion of the director, actor Will Grayson (playing Chris Keller) and I began corresponding as Chris and Ann to inform the development of our romantic relationship. Miller provided a few details about the contents of the letters, including: Chris believes Ann has forgotten about Larry from the content of her letters (14), Ann almost got married two years ago but didn't because Chris began writing to her (30), and Chris was ambiguous with his intentions in writing to Ann, in her opinion (30). With these textually supported ideas in mind we began our correspondence:

Letter 1

Dear Annie,

I hope this letter finds you well. When I found out that you moved to New York, I couldn't believe it. We spent so many years together and now you're gone. I hope the new distance between us won't prevent us from staying in touch. The neighborhood is so different now without you and your brother. It seems like only yesterday George and I shipped out. It amazes me how much the world has changed since then. It is strange working for my father again. I would like it very much if you were to write me back. I've found myself missing you since I returned. I would hate it if the distance between us meant the end of such a long and great relationship.

Sincerely,

Chris Keller

P.S. What are you doing these days?

Letter 2

Dear Chris,

I can't tell you how surprised I was to receive your letter. It's wonderful to hear from you! I think about you and your family often. I hope you are all doing well. It makes me miss home to hear you talk about the neighborhood. New York is great, but it's not home! George, Mother, and I are living in a nice, spacious apartment on the Upper East Side. It's modest, but it's all we need. I'm working in the advertising department at Macy's. I really like my job, and I get great discounts on clothes. George is working at a law firm, but has big plans to open his own office soon! I think he'll do it, too. Mother is finally starting to perk back up. I think she wants to get a job to pass the time. She's never worked outside the home, so she's having trouble figuring out where to start. George and I are helping her, of course.

I won't ramble on any longer, but I just feel like there's so much to say to you. I'm glad you are home. I would love to stay in touch with you. Please write to me soon!

Sincerely,

Annie

P.S. Say "hi" to your parents for me!

Letter 3

Dear Annie,

It was great hearing from you. I am so glad to hear that things are going well for you. My parents are doing very well all things considered. Dad's driving me pretty hard down at the shop. That man has such high expectations, I don't know if I'm the man he wants me to be. So, advertising, that sounds exciting. I'm very happy for you. I always

knew you would find happiness. If only you could find the same joy back here. The landscape just isn't the same at all without you. I told Dad that I wrote to you, and he asked me to say 'Hello' for him. He always loved you, Annie. You were always the most charming girl in the neighborhood. Give your mother my best and tell George that I'm very proud of him. I knew he'd succeed. Well, take care of yourself and write me back. I'd love to hear about life in the big city. I only got to go to New York once, so I can't imagine what life must be like there for you.

Sincerely,

Chris Keller

Letter 4

Dear Chris,

Anticipating your letters has become my favorite pastime! My mother and George were happy to hear your "hello" and to know that you and your parents are doing well. Your father's drive with you is just a by-product of his hope for your future, I'm sure. One thing that was always obvious was your parents' great love for their sons! I was always a little bit envious growing up!

How is your family handling the loss of your brother? Not that I think it will ever be possible to completely recover from, but I hope that the grief is subsiding. I imagine that with the things you saw during the war it is somewhat easier for you to comprehend than for your parents. I know you are a tremendous blessing to them. I still miss him terribly, but I'm beginning to heal.

On a brighter note, life in the city is nice! It's not Ohio, my first love, but it provides the kind of distraction the three of us needed. My job at Macy's isn't

fascinating at all, but the shopping is, so it evens out! Please don't stop writing to me! I love reading about your life and about home!

Love,

Annie

Letter 5

Dear Annie,

Writing the letters to you has become one of the events I most look forward to. Reading your letters and responding is a poor substitute for actual conversation, but I don't mind. The anticipation of reading what you have written and being able to respond has really become one of the great joys in my life.

Obviously the loss of Larry has been trying. I do wonder how you are handling his passing. I miss my brother, but I have pride knowing that he gave his life fighting for what he believed in. That's no replacement for grief, but that's how I'm choosing to get through it. Mother, of course has taken it the hardest, but Dad and I are working towards some kind of normality. I believe she'll pull through.

With few exceptions, life here is pretty good. The plant is up and running properly again. The town is getting bigger too, I couldn't believe it when I got back. Well, I need to get back to work. I'm writing during my lunch break and I'm running late. Write soon.

Sincerely,

Chris Keller

Letter 6

Dear Chris,

We've been here in New York City for over a year, and I'm still having trouble adjusting to the differences. The people aren't nearly as friendly as they used to be back home before everything happened, of course. Like yesterday, for instance, I was walking to Macy's and the heel of my shoe fell into one of those ventilation grates on the sidewalk and I twisted my ankle. I didn't sprain it, but I twisted it enough that I had trouble getting up and then I struggled to pull my shoe from the grate. And would you believe that not a single person stopped to help! Not that I was crying for it, but it just made me realize that we were pretty lucky to have been raised in the neighborhood where we were. Those other families on our block were like my own—especially yours. I miss it so much sometimes. I'm afraid, though, that things could never be the same after everything that happened. Someday I'll tell you some stories that will astonish you, but not right now. I, too, am writing at work, so I should get back to it! Write to me soon!

Love,

Annie

Letter 7

Dear Annie,

I'm sorry to hear about your trouble on the sidewalk. What a shame that no one would stop to help you. How's your ankle doing? I hope you aren't in any pain. I guess we were lucky to have been raised where we were. It's always been a lovely neighborhood. Of course these days it is missing something. I completely understand how you feel about it though. I can't imagine what you were put through, having to be face to face with that. Please don't think this place is off limits to you. You have just as

much right to this block as anyone who lives on it. I doubt that anyone holds anything against you or your mother and George. I don't.

On a different note, I finally talked Dad into washing machine assembly. He didn't think we had the equipment or personnel to do it, but I managed to convince him. Of course I had to inform him that the wages he was paying out were a little dated. We locked horns over that for days. Well, I think I rambled enough about work. You take care and write me back very soon.

Sincerely,

Chris Keller

P.S. Keep an eye out for those pesky grates.

Letter 8

Dear Chris,

Thank you for your concern about my ankle! It was just a little sore for a day or so, no big deal. I think my feelings were hurt more than my ankle! Gosh, sometimes I really am too sensitive! Thanks for your warning about the "pesky grates!" I'll be more careful next time!

So you must be some kind of a hero down at the plant, huh? I'm sure the guys love you if they know you were the one responsible for getting them higher wages! Good for you, Chris. I guess I don't understand the "washing machine assembly" part. Are washing machines going to be more lucrative than what you are producing now? Maybe it's none of my business! You don't have to answer that!

Thank you for saying what you did about our block and about Mother and George. It's so nice to know at least you feel that way. The time between the trial and

when we left is such a blur. The details evade me, like a nightmare, and I'm left with a series of images and events that sicken me. I'm sure my attitude at the time contributed to the outcome of those events. I wasn't very pleasant to anyone during all of that. Given the height of the turmoil, I think the best thing we could have done (for everyone) was to move away. One of the only people, aside from your mother, who still talked to me when I left was Lydia. How is she? And Frank and the kids? I fear I may have burnt that bridge before I left too. I hope not; maybe I'll write to her. What do you think?

You know, after we moved I only heard news about George during the war. Occasionally, Mother would tell me that Kate had written and said you survived a big battle, but I've always been curious about what your experience was. George made it out, but his left hand was mutilated and severely burned by a grenade. Are you left with any war wounds? I certainly hope not.

It looks like I broke our "one page" precedent! There's just so much I want to know. I'm sorry if this letter is too forward or seems pushy or like I'm prying into your personal life. I just care about you, Chris, and have thought about you so many times over the years that my curiosity has gotten the better of me! If I haven't scared you off completely, write back soon!

Love,

Annie

Letter 9

Dearest Annie,

I don't think you understand what it means to me to hear you say that you have an interest in my life. You of all people should have no fear in asking me any question you

like. Talking to you about my life in the plant actually makes going to that place worthwhile. Don't get me wrong, I am grateful to Dad for giving me the job I have, but fighting for nickels and dimes all day long is not my idea of a life. All the money in the world does not buy the few things that really matter. Do you also find it astonishing that the most valuable things in life are completely free? Liberty. Faith. Love. Honesty. Valor.

I'm sorry to hear about George's hand. Thank God it was only his hand. I have my wounds, both physical and emotional, but I would do it all over again to protect what is dear to me. I took some shrapnel in the back, I have hearing trouble in my left ear, and I dislocated my right shoulder. Sorry to hit you with all of that. None of my wounds really linger too much except my hearing, but I don't mind, considering I work in a machine shop.

As far as Frank and Lydia, things are really no different for them. Frank is still selling clothes and Lydia takes care of the home and three children.

Annie, I have a bit of news that you may not enjoy. Your house was recently purchased. They're a young couple with a little boy. The Baylisses. They are very nice. I thought I should tell you. Hope all is well, write soon.

Love,

Chris Keller

Letter 10

Dear Chris,

I love that the events of the last five years or so have not changed who you are fundamentally. You were always the one, out of the four of us, who kept us all in line.

You were the voice of reason, and your integrity was something you were simply born with, I guess. I can still hear it in your letters. It's comforting to me!

It sounds like you got hit pretty hard during the war. I'm glad none of the injuries continue to linger, except for your left ear. I'll have to remember that the next time I get to see you. I hope it's sometime soon!

I'm happy to hear Frank and Lydia are doing well! Last I heard they only had two kids. They've been busy! I remember Johnny, the oldest, but I've forgotten their other one's name. I'd love it if you'd include their names and ages in your next letter. I think I'll write to Lydia soon and maybe send a baby (or toddler!) gift to their youngest.

Although it's kind of sad to think about someone else living in our house, I'm glad that you like them. And it makes me happy to know they have a child who will grow up in that house. I loved that house! And our backyards adjoining one another! Remember that tree house the four of us tried to build in the poplars? Gosh, that was a fiasco! I don't think we quite understood the mechanics of building one, let alone that we probably should have used a more substantial tree! I think our parents had just planted them a couple years prior; I bet they're getting big now, though. Oh, a trip down memory lane! Bittersweet—sorry to drag you along with me!

All is well here in the "Big Apple!" Give my best to your parents, and, as always, I look forward to hearing from you!

Love,

Annie

P.S. I told George we've been corresponding, and he said he'd love to swap combat stories with you sometime!

Letter 11

Dear Annie,

Sorry it has taken me so long to respond, but Dad has kept me very busy at the plant. We're adding a new assembly line this month and Dad put me in charge of it. The plant is really starting to grow now, you should see it.

Lydia says "Hello!" She was quite excited to hear that you and I have started a correspondence. You remember Johnny, he's 8 now, and they have two daughters, Rebecca, 6, and Sarah, 2. They have a very active household; I don't need to tell you. All the laughter coming out of their home reminds me of our childhood. I do remember that tree house and what kind of a disaster it turned out to be. Although all the trees in this yard are probably strong enough to support a tree house now.

Don't worry about my wounds, as I said, they really aren't that serious. I've learned to adjust well to the hearing, and the other wounds don't bother me at all anymore. I do have some disgusting scars however.

I'm sorry to tell you about your house. If it is any comfort, the Baylisses are great people. Dr. Bayliss is a very intelligent and caring man. We served together briefly in the war. He was a medic in my battalion. That reminds me, tell George we can swap stories any time. I'm sure he's got a few good ones to tell. Well Annie, work calls, please write soon.

Love,

Chris Keller

Letter 12

Dear Chris,

I'm glad to hear you're staying busy! What's the new assembly line you're in charge of? Are you your dad's "right hand man" now? I'm sure he loves having you in the plant with him! I would love to see the changes at the plant someday. I bet it's exciting around there.

Wow! Frank and Lydia! I can't believe they have three already! It hardly seems possible that so much time has passed. I remember Johnny being one of the sweetest little boys I had ever seen, and I'm certain their girls are too!

The Baylisses sound like wonderful people. That's comforting. I'm sure it's nice to live next to someone who knows what it was really like overseas in the war. I've been hearing stories about soldiers who are having a difficult time readjusting to civilian life. It has been tough on George. I hope you and Dr. Bayliss are not experiencing that.

By the way, George said he would love to see you. Ever think about vacationing in the city? I know it's not the ideal place for relaxing, but it's pretty exciting...! Think about it!

Love,

Annie

Letter 13

Dear Annie,

My life has become completely about pressure cookers these days. Dad is convinced that new home appliances is the future. I can't say I disagree with him. You really should see it Ann, that plant has gotten very modern and very fast paced. It doesn't even look like the same business anymore. It's managed to create this new life that I never expected to have. I always imagined I'd become something more like a writer or

professor, but now it's all about pressure cookers. I guess that it's something I could still change, but I love my family and I want to make Dad proud. Family is very important to him. It is to me of course, but Dad really relishes in it. Wow, I didn't mean to unload on you like that. It was just so easy to say it to you. I feel like I don't have to keep any secrets or regrets when I write to you. This correspondence has created a certain comfort for me that I don't know you could understand. I do, however, like your idea of seeing you, but how about you coming back home? I'd love to visit New York, but I'd much rather see you in this backyard again. Think about it.

Love,

Chris Keller

Will Grayson and I decided that immediately following the receipt of this letter I called him and arranged a trip back to Ohio. Writing these letters reminded me of the unique intimacy that is created between the two involved. A certain secret and very personal bond begins to take root when private details are shared confidentially with another. Writing letters has become a lost art in today's world of email, text, and instant messaging. This exercise proved invaluable in helping me understand how I could arrive at the Keller's with my heart set on marrying Chris after having not seen him for five years, especially with the scandal that occurred and my past relationship with his brother. Corresponding also reinforced the hopeful anticipation which Ann arrives with in Act One; her hope was conditioned for two years prior to her arrival. Actually writing the letters made the hope tangible in way that just imagining the correspondence could not.

Influences and Inspirations in Creating the Role

I watched *The Notebook* to study the social life of a young, single woman during the 1940s. It included wonderfully rich examples of the clothing, hair, and make-up styles of the era. It also captured the way World War II scattered people all over the world and drastically changed their lives, all while reinforcing the idea that the past always comes back to seek retribution for anything left unsettled -- this theme runs thick in *All My Sons*.

I watched *Saving Private Ryan* to study the soldier's life in World War II, but quickly wished I had not, as Ann is only able to imagine through stories she hears from her family and friends and the limited clips and news-worthy stories she catches on TV and in the newspapers.

Watching *Pearl Harbor* was beneficial for understanding how the war made it possible for grieving loved ones to find refuge in each others' arms. In it, two young men enjoy a lifelong friendship, but when it's mistakenly reported that one of the young men has died in the war, his best friend develops a relationship with his fiancée. Watching the secondary love story develop after already rooting for the primary love story to succeed was fascinating. I was able to understand how the relationship developed under such tragic circumstances and began to empathize with their need to heal the hurt (as in the case with Chris and Ann), but at the same time understood how some could have a hard time accepting it (as with George and Kate). One of the biggest questions I had at the outset of rehearsals was whether or not I could do what Ann does under the same circumstances. To marry the brother of my sweetheart seemed, at first, unthinkable; however, after researching the war and its transformational effect on this nation and its people I am being opened to the possibility.

Miracle on 34th Street was a suggestion from the director to inform the choices I had made about Ann's life in New York City. Because of Miller's inclusion of a dress that cost Ann

“three weeks’ salary” (Miller 21), the decision was made that I have been working at Macy’s in the advertising department. After more research, I found that in its early years Macy’s was headquartered in both Columbus and Cincinnati, Ohio (“Macy’s”)—a fact that would not have escaped Ann’s notice and likely motivated her to stay with the company to move up the ladder and consequently back home.

Claude Monet’s *Poplars (Autumn)* was inspirational in my work on creating childhood memories in our backyards, even though late in the rehearsal process the poplars were changed to cedars due to production limits.

The Ohio Historical Society had archives of photos online from the 1940s aptly depicting suburban life, downtown social scenes, automobiles, and social life at Lake Erie, all of which inspired inner life while playing Ann. One photograph, in particular, of a handsome, young man standing on the wing of his grounded plane provided endless inspiration in my imaginative work regarding Larry.

Will Counts’ photographs of Elizabeth Eckford’s walk to Central High School in Little Rock on September 4, 1957 surrounded by an angry mob of protestors became the source of my imaginative work on Mrs. Hammond yelling “Murderers!” in front of our house.

In preparation for the correspondence with Will Grayson, playing Chris, I read a few of the World War II entries on the *I, Witness to History* website. The first-hand accounts of the war years from two ladies helped me to better understand life on the home front (“Leone Bare”) and the economic boom resulting from the war (“Mary Clark”).

D. REFLECTIONS ON THE AUDITION, REHEARSAL AND PRODUCTION PROCESSES

The Audition Process

The audition process began with General Auditions for the 2007-08 season in late August 2007; required were two contrasting monologues and 32 bars of a song. Auditioning for the role of Ann commenced and concluded during the week of August 27th to September, 3rd, 2007. The director, Michael Landman, provided sides for each of the roles he was auditioning. In preparation for my audition, I made objective and initial action choices for each of Ann's scenes. At the culmination of the process, I was cast as Ann Deever.

November 26, 2007 – First Rehearsal

Preparatory work for the initial rehearsal involved reading the play in its entirety three times. Questions began to surface: What motivates Ann to return? What were the circumstances surrounding the Deever's decision to move to New York? How has Ann's time away impacted her outlook on life, her relationship to the Kellers, and her desires? What is the timeline of events? How much communication has occurred between Chris and Ann since she left?

I began a list of images, specific moments that I, as the actor playing Ann, would have to experience intimately in my imagination in order to speak truthfully about them on stage: What did our backyards and houses look like during our childhood? How are they different now? What was it like to sit in the backyard and watch Larry fly low over our houses? What was the experience of looking out my window and seeing Mrs. Hammond in our yard yelling "Murderers!?" How did our families "raise hell" together? What specifically made those times with the Kellers so special and exhilarating? What was the courtroom experience? What was

the experience of visiting my dad in jail? What was the experience of receiving Larry's letters and finally, his last letter?

Tonight the company read through the play. The director asked that we remain open to stopping as questions arose. The main questions that surfaced were time-related: How long since anyone has heard from Larry? How long since the Deevers moved to New York? How long since Ann and Chris have seen each other? What year did the three boys enter the war? We began to formulate a timeline based on statements in the text that the entire cast could agree upon.

Other questions came up: What is my job in New York? Where in Ohio are we? What is the weather like? What was the culture like in the late 1940s?

The director provided resources for us to peruse in order to begin our pursuit of understanding the World War II era in America. *Casablanca*, *Saving Private Ryan*, and *Band of Brothers* were suggested films and miniseries to watch to invoke the wartime era. Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby were suggested musicians to listen to in order to get a feel for the "big band" era. Wallace Shawn's *The Fever* was suggested reading to understand the questioning of culture and culpability.

It was our charge as we left the first rehearsal to continue to add to our list of questions and begin combing the text for answers.

November 27, 2007

In preparation for today's rehearsal I read the text for more questions. Also, I began to fill in events on the timeline. Chris is oldest, three years separate Chris and Larry, Larry is one year older than me, so Chris is four years older than me. When did I get the letter from Larry telling me he would not return home? He wrote it on November 25th, but of what year? How

well do I know Lydia and Frank? I take the one o'clock train on Saturday night to arrive at the Keller's. How long have I been on the train the night before? Did I tell my mother I was coming? Did I tell George? Dad's trial – what was it like? When did we decide to move to New York? Lydia asks Joe if I'm "still unhappy" – why? What, specifically, was my behavior after my father's conviction and before we left for NYC? She thought I'd be married with three babies by now, not her. What about my life, led her to believe this about me? What are the implications of being raised the only girl and youngest child out of the four of us? How much truth is in the "P-40" story? Why did I blame my dad, when Larry blamed his for what happened? Why didn't I get married two years ago? Who was I going to marry? What was the experience of that relationship? How long did I grieve for Larry? Do I still grieve for him? What was the experience of grieving for him? Why didn't Larry and I marry before he left? Why does Kate say "she's a sensitive girl"? What was our relationship like with Mrs. Hammond prior to her "Murderers" exhibition? Why do I insist on my father's involvement? Do I know Larry didn't fly a P-40? How much of what I say to the Kellers is because I think it's what they want to hear? How much is the truth? Joe calls my father a "little man...always scared of loud voices." How did I feel about my father before the incident as opposed to after? Why do I say I'm not good in an argument? Did we raise hell before Larry went to war or MIA? What was the experience of Joe being exonerated and my father being convicted? What exactly does George say to me on the phone? Why do I say he's excited? My dress cost me three weeks salary. What is my occupation? We seem to be joyful and nasty while cracking jokes with one another. Is this comforting? Reminiscent of the past? How is it different?

Tonight we continued table work on Act One, and the ensemble agreed on a few events on the timeline of the events in our world:

1. 1942 – Chris, George, and Larry enter the war.
2. 1943 – September: Keller’s plant ships faulty cylinder heads. October: Planes crash as a result. November: Larry crashes. December: Receive Larry’s letter and cease communication with Dad.
3. 1944 – February: Mom and I move to New York.
4. 1945 – D-Day, war ends. Chris and George return home. Chris to Ohio and George to NYC.
5. 1947 – Present year.

Our costume designer, Patricia Martin, brought in renderings. The designer told me I’d be wearing blue-hued dresses with a 1947 Christian Dior silhouette. The designer told me there were riots in France over the types of dresses I would be wearing because they were made from approximately 25 yards of fabric in stark contrast to the three to four yards of fabric that were used for most wartime dresses. Just two years after the war ended wearing a dress of this nature would garner a lot of attention in small-town Ohio, USA. This raised a few questions for me: Why would I want to attract that kind of attention? What statement am I trying to make? Why? For whose benefit am I wearing this dress? Why?

As we left rehearsal, the director asked that we come in tomorrow with ideas about our objectives, the details of specific events mentioned in the text, and the era in which the play takes place.

November 28, 2007

Exploration of super-objectives calls into question several key points. First, I come to marry Chris (Miller 65), that's why I'm here. But why him? Why now? What does it mean to be 26 years old and single for a woman in 1947? What was our relationship like before the war?

What exactly was said in our correspondence that led me to this decision? What do I lack that I feel marrying Chris Keller will provide? And, equally as important, what was the experience of letting go of Larry? What did I lose when I lost him? Is it rational to believe that marrying his brother can restore that to me? How much of the psychology of this am I aware of as Ann?

At this point, I think I want stability. It's what I had my entire life before the war, but what I've been stripped of since. I want it back. I want a life, a family, a home where I grew up. I want to feel safe again. Chris Keller can provide my pre-war dream for the sweetest life more closely than anyone else on this earth. But what do I stand to lose from this decision, also? What is the cost? Or is there one?

On this trajectory, stability as a result of marrying Chris for my super-objective, I begin to postulate scene objectives.

Act 1, Scene 1 with the Kellers: I want signs from each that I'm welcome here. I'm not entirely sure how each of them feels about my being here and must know in order to smoothly navigate this situation into marriage. I want to know that I'm welcome in the neighborhood, too. I want to know what the neighbors think about us, about Joe.

Scene 2 with Chris: I want him to finally ask me to marry him. I immediately tell him I'm not staying to spur him to action. If he's not going to ask me, I need to leave. It's painful here.

Scene 3 with George on the phone: I want him to calm down. He's coming, and I can't have him ruin tonight. Chris and I need to tell Kate we're engaged.

Act 2, Scene 1 with Chris: I want him to commit to telling Kate tonight. I can't live with the anxiety. She's not being warm to me at all.

Scene 2 with Sue: I want her to like me. When Chris and I settle in this neighborhood I'd like us to be friends. Then, she reveals half-way through the scene she doesn't want us here because of Chris' idealism and its detrimental effect on her husband's devotion to his family. From then on, I want her to see it my way, to change her opinion of Chris. I don't want any enemies here, as that would threaten our future stability.

Scene 3 with Chris: I want him to confess he lied about people accepting Joe as innocent. I want to know everything he knows about his father's innocence or guilt. I need to be a united front with him when George gets here.

Scene 4 with Joe: I want him on our side against Kate. I want him to feel totally secure in my loyalty with him (over my father) so he'll be completely loyal to Chris and me (over Kate, if she rejects us).

Scene 5 with George: I want him to forget/let go of his vendetta against Joe. It will ruin Chris' and my chance at happiness together. If he can't do that, I need him to leave.

Act 3 with Joe & Kate: I need Joe to leave, so I can destroy Kate's lie. I need Kate to accept Larry's death so Chris & I can live.

Act 3 with Chris: I want him to leave with me tonight.

These are preliminary objective choices to be used in rehearsal. Undoubtedly, they will change or become more finely tuned, but they are launching pads for the rehearsals to come.

Today we had another full company read-through. We continued to flesh-out the timeline. Joe was exonerated in early 1944, shortly before we moved to NYC. It becomes apparent that Larry killed himself prior to this. I believe the court records: Joe is innocent, my father is guilty. Larry didn't know this. This helps justify my super-objective. The Keller family represents my former life, its security, joy, and prosperity. I feel safe and loved at the

Keller's. My home was destroyed by my father. My father was responsible for Larry's death, not Joe.

The director posed this question to the cast: Have we ever been under such pressure that we made the wrong decision, we gave up our ethics, we compromised our values?

My biggest question at this point is: Why do I bring the letter? Why haven't I shared this with Chris or any of the other Kellers? Wouldn't it have provided much needed closure? Am I subconsciously protecting my father? Why would I do that? In my correspondence with Chris, have we discussed his family coping with the news of Larry? What have we discussed? I think it would be helpful in my process to 1) finish the letter Larry wrote to me, so I know how it ends, and 2) discuss with the actor playing Chris and the director exactly what the letters said, duration of correspondence, etc.

At this point, I'm unearthing throngs of questions but have not explored possible answers fully. Beginning that process along with source work of visuals specifically mentioned in the play are my goals for tomorrow's rehearsal.

November 29, 2007

Preparatory work for today's rehearsal dealt mostly with my relationship to my father. The biggest question looming is: What is the cost of cutting my father out of my life? To fully understand I must first delve into our relationship pre-trial. Obviously, the higher the cost, the bigger the payoff when I learn of his innocence late in the play. (Personally, issues concerning my real-life father are hot, touchy things. I find it difficult to explore this question because of the raw emotionality attached to it. But the father/daughter relationship is wrapped up in Ann's complete abandonment of her former life and so must be scathingly explored. As an actor, it feels vulture-like at times to pick at real, open wounds, but I'm learning in my graduate studies

that my experiences are the only paints on my palette, and so they must be used. The imagination provides remarkable highlight, shadow, and definition but, ultimately, my life is the backdrop for what I can bring to a character.) I've never written to him in jail, almost four years, but started out following him there and visiting every chance I could (Miller 27). Larry's letter changed my mind about our fathers' guilt. Then Joe was exonerated, and suddenly my father was solely responsible for my love's death, the death of 21 pilots, the destruction of our family, and the destruction of the Keller family. The relationship pre-war was deeply loving, respectful, and joyful. I made the decision that I was a Daddy's girl, as supported by the text when I say I was crying all the time, followed him to jail, and visited every time I could (27). So in the winter of my 22nd year, I experienced immense loss: Larry, my father, my friends, my home, and my security. Not to mention a complete alteration in my relationship with my mother and brother as a result of our grief. Researching the grieving process will be helpful in understanding the influence such loss would have on a young woman.

Visual research of textual references (poplars, haberdashers, 1940s fashion, 1940s convertibles, 1940s suburban Ohio and Lake Erie) provided vivid images to incorporate into imaginative exercises.

Today's rehearsal opened with our first full-company warm-up session and moved into another read-through and discussion. More questions arose: What is my job in NYC? I'll explore the possibility of incorporating the fashion industry since I saved three week's salary to buy that dress. How common is it for a 26 year old, single woman to be working and supporting herself in 1945-'47 in NYC? Kate says I'm "faithful as a rock," (Miller 19) why? Is it just because I'm single, and she believes it's due to waiting for Larry to return? Have Chris and I written about how his family, specifically Kate, is coping with Larry? What have I discussed

with my mother and brother concerning my intentions in returning to the Keller's? A demand for imaginative work lies in the telling of the story of Mrs. Hammond yelling "Murderers!" on our front lawn. The director suggested I research the Little Rock Nine for public demonstrations of hate. I found one particularly disturbing photograph succinctly depicting the extreme persecution from a mob of emotionally charged adults that Elizabeth Eckford endured on her walk to school. It is a terrifying image but very useful for my imaginative work in creating Mrs. Hammond's outburst in our yard.

After today's rehearsal, it is evident that there is an incredible amount of imaginative work combined with research of the era that will be necessary in order to fully flesh out this character.

My goal for tomorrow's rehearsal is to explore possible events and conversations that influenced my decision to return to the Keller's - in particular, those with Chris, George, and Mother.

November 30, 2007

Imagining in detail the letters Chris and I wrote to each other over the past year raise all sorts of questions. It has become apparent that discussing the details with the director and the actor playing Chris will be extremely helpful. I will broach the subject today.

Also, I imagined a sorrowful conversation with my mother as I left for Ohio. I do not believe I 'ran away,' rather it seems logical that she would want to see me happy after so many years of pain and that I could speak openly with her about my correspondence with Chris. I envision that the notion of me marrying Chris makes her very anxious, but I know that the security that will result can benefit my 'widowed' mother. I imagine moving her back to Ohio to live with our family. I imagine coaxing George to move back, as well. First, though, I prepared

for today's rehearsal by creating the heated discussion George and I had when I told him of my plans to go to the Keller's. He did not like my decision, tried to persuade me to stay, but out of his love for me eventually wished me well.

Tonight's rehearsal was the final table reading. The director presented a goal for the cast: that we would be off-book the second time we rehearse a scene. Almost two weeks with the text before my next rehearsal will provide ample time to memorize and continue researching the questions posed thus far.

The read tonight solidified my need to create the other side of the phone conversation with George so that I know exactly what I am responding to (verbal and non-verbal). Evidence of my father's past behaviors was exposed tonight through Keller's dialogue. What do I remember, if anything, of the heater story from 1937 to which he supposedly did not accept blame? What do I know about Dad blaming Frank for the bad tip? What specifically are his "heart problems"? How does the mention of all these things affect me? Also demanding imaginative work is Chris and Ann's car ride at the end of Act One. Finally, one big question still looms: Do I plan to reveal the letter from the beginning, or not?

Goals for the break, besides the aforementioned, are to re-read the play several times to solidify the action and to re-examine my super-objective and objective choices and test them against new-found details of the script.

December 12, 2007

The break provided much-needed research time to fill in holes in the script. I imagined through my life in NYC. I decided that I work at Macy's in the advertising department. It's a good job with a good salary, so when I say that I've saved three weeks salary for the dress I'm wearing (Miller 21), it's a significant amount. The director suggested I watch *Miracle on 34th*

Street to get the feel for a 1940s New York Macy's. Also, I imagined through my serious relationship with a man in New York. I believe it was my mother's attempt to help me move on from Larry, so she set me up with one of her church friend's sons. I also believe that as soon as I received the first letter from Chris I knew my current relationship would not end in marriage. After the second letter, I broke it off to pursue Chris. I re-created the experience of intense longing and imagined how the intensity would increase over three and half years. I want nothing more than to go back home to the life I had before the war. My super-objective and objectives still feel right after further examination, so I look forward to playing with them in the rehearsals to come.

We began moving through Act One today. With a firm idea of the set and several platforms in place, the director gave us a basic outline for movement but allowed us the freedom to explore our impulses. I spoke to the director and actor playing Chris about the contents of our letters. We will begin a correspondence to explore that experience.

Goals for tomorrow's rehearsal include fully imagining through the experience of arriving here last night; the experience of traveling 700 miles via train, arriving during a wind storm at one o'clock in the morning, seeing Joe and Chris at the train station, arriving at the Keller house, sleeping in Larry's room, having breakfast with Kate, and putting on my brand new dress.

December 13, 2007

In addition to moment-before work for Act One, I prepared for today's rehearsal of the proposal scene by imagining a two-year correspondence with my love's brother. How was I surprised by the feelings growing inside me toward Chris? What is the experience of fantasizing for two years about an ideal life that I believe is within reach? What was the transformation like

moving from the first tickle of intimate feelings for Chris to an absolute certainty of wanting to marry him and move back to Ohio? What are the gray areas: guilt for marrying Larry's brother, worry about what our friends and family will think, pain I could potentially cause my family for marrying into the Keller family? How do these gray areas influence my behavior specifically?

Today's rehearsal brought to light how important it is for me to understand the kind of relationship Kate and I enjoyed before the war; the deeper and more loving, the better for my stakes with her as an actor. She says some excruciatingly harsh things to me about my appearance, my hopes in marrying Chris, and my thoughts about my father's guilt and Larry's death. Has she ever spoken to me this way before? How have the changes in her demeanor affected me? With two years of anticipation of this day, the sadness, hurt, joy, and shame are all magnified.

For next time, I need to imagine through the experience of the car ride with Chris while we anxiously await the arrival of George. What do we talk about? What don't we talk about? It's our first time alone together since I arrived. How does that affect our behavior toward each other?

December 18, 2007

In preparation for today's rehearsal, I focused primarily on getting off-book for Act One. We ran the first act; it was rocky, but we definitely have the foundation for a good show. For the upcoming Winter Break, complete memorization of the text and blocking thus far is a supreme goal, naturally. The process of being on-book to off-book has always proven to be uncomfortable for me. I don't experience much freedom with impulses, if any, during this time. Also, for the break, I will invest a considerable amount of time dropping in my past experiences in this yard. So much about this play in particular refers to the past and its immediate effect on

the present. To be fully in the moment and present on stage, I first need to fully drop in the experiences and circumstances referenced in the text. This type of dropping in work is never finished. Just like in life, we continue to relive past events and weigh them against our present circumstances. I love to do this work, though, so I'm looking forward to deepening my connection to the text.

December 26, 2007

During this break my focus has been imaginative work. Mining the text has surfaced some new areas demanding attention. What was the experience of Larry copying my homework? How did it make me feel? What sounds, sights, and smells do I remember from our homework sessions? How exactly did the Kellers and Deevers "raise hell" (Miller 22)? I believe the time we shared together was the happiest in my life and has a huge influence on my desperation to be with Chris, to try to get it back. How do I feel about Mom and Dad staying together and living in New York when he gets out? I imagine the conversations Mom and I have had; me trying to convince her to divorce him and her eventually convincing me that the right thing to do is stay with him. How do these conversations solidify my determination to chase my dreams? What do I know about Burma? Has Chris written to me about it or has it been in the news? Have I been reading the stories about the returning missing soldiers? Why or why not? What does that do to me? How did I react to Larry? What were the specific stages I went through in grieving him? Certain of the sadness I felt, was I also angry with him? I imagine feeling helpless in the world, being hit with wave after wave of tragedy and having no power to change it. How does this change me? What exactly was our old house in Ohio like? Specifically, what was the experience of Mrs. Hammond yelling in our yard that day? Something I have yet to explore is the break between Acts Two and Three. When I go to the

curb with George, Chris drives away. I make my way to Larry's room and lock myself in until I come down late that night. Questions I have are: Did I talk to Chris before he left, and when I saw Joe sobbing in the yard did it confirm my suspicion of his guilt? Also, why do I come out when I come out? Has it taken me this long to work up the courage to show Kate Larry's letter? Have I been waiting for Chris to return? What are the scenarios I am playing out in my head while I sit in my room upstairs? What are my options here? How does the secret of having Larry's letter with me influence my behavior in each subsequent scene before it is revealed? Was it always my intent to reveal it, or was it just a worst-case scenario plan?

With a little over a week of the break left, I plan to explore these additional questions deeply.

January 7, 2008

Over the break I was able to imaginatively explore so much of Ann's past. I spent some time researching the stages of grief outlined by psychiatrist, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance) and how Ann specifically experienced each in grieving the loss of her father, her home, and Larry.

I accomplished the goal of getting completely off book, however, in our first rehearsal after the winter break it did not seem to help much. Rehearsing Act Two was very rough due to line and blocking recall. I am not worried, though; we are all just rusty after being away for so long. The foundational work we established in the first week is keeping us afloat for now. This week we are rehearsing twice a day, once in the afternoon and once in the evening. Next week University classes resume, and we will go back to one evening rehearsal per day.

Act Two is bumpy roller coaster ride. It starts fairly calmly. Chris and I are going to tell Kate tonight that we are getting married. Sue comes over and destroys my belief (which Chris

had given me) that the neighborhood is safe for us to settle down in. I tell Chris I am leaving. He finally asks me to marry him, so I decide to stay. Joe says he wants to give Dad a job when he gets out of jail, which raises my suspicion of him. George comes and raises my suspicion of Joe even further, but Kate calms George down so perhaps everything is fine. Then Kate and Joe slip up and reveal their potential guilt. I choose Chris over George. Chris and George both leave. How has my relationship with Chris changed over the course of Act Two? Do I feel like I'm being lied to? Who do I believe? How much do I believe? How does all of this uncertainty affect my behavior? In preparation for tomorrow's rehearsal, I will begin to explore these questions.

January 8, 2008

This afternoon's rehearsal was focused on blocking the end of Act Two. It moves from a party to an explosion in about five minutes. My biggest question for this section has to do with the struggle with who to believe and whose side to take. I love the Kellers and I love my brother, so how difficult is it to choose? After the choice is made, does doubt linger? What does that do to me? How does it manifest in my behavior? When I see Chris speed away in the car and Joe in a crumpled ball on the lawn, do I know what has happened? I believe I do, at this point. I spend hours alone in my room between Acts Two and Three; what am I doing? Am I waiting for Chris to return? Am I working up the courage to show Kate the letter to stop her illusion from growing any stronger? Why do I come out when I do? Do I believe Chris has left me for good? Or do I believe he's coming back for me? Once the blocking and lines are solid, I can really begin to explore the implications of these questions.

Tonight we also touched on Act One to prepare for the run of it tomorrow afternoon. We worked Joe's monologue convincing Ann and Chris that Ann's father is human and simply made a mistake. How badly do I want to believe this?

In preparation for tomorrow, I will review my objectives, blocking, and lines for Act One.

January 9, 2008

This afternoon's run of Act One was a success for everyone involved. The director was very happy with our work thus far. He has detailed notes he will work next time we visit this act. I realized the higher we can go in terms of positivity and excitement in Act One, the more devastating it will be when the illusion crashes in Act Three. Since I cannot play 'positivity and excitement', I translate that to my objective and the stakes attached. I don't just want to be married to Chris; I *need* the stability and security that a life with him will provide. I have put all my eggs in one basket, so to speak. I am completely committed to making this dream a reality, to wiping our slate clean and starting anew. This hope provides a high no drug can induce, and this is the hope that must be living inside me at the top of the show. Something to explore will be the journey of hope diminishing. Do I lose hope altogether? If so, do I get it back? At what cost?

The director made me aware of some of the lines that are being lost either due to speaking into the wings or because of sloppy diction. I will work on infusing those lines with more need to make sure they're not lost.

Tonight was our first exploration with Act Three. We are still on book for this act, so tonight was mostly about blocking and asking questions. Approximately six hours have passed since Chris left. The director suggested tonight that Ann's "star of honesty burns out" while

she's upstairs. The playwright, through the character of Jim Bayliss, says Chris probably drove somewhere "to be alone to watch his star go out" (Miller 61). If this is true, how does it affect my behavior, my attitude towards life, and my relationships? What specifically is the process of one's light burning out? How, as an actor, do I make this metaphor playable? Also, in Act Two I allude to the fact that it could never work between us if Joe is guilty. If my idealism has been replaced with pragmatism, how does this change? Am I willing to compromise my morals for what I want? It appears so, given the outcome of the play. Also, given the outcome, I am choosing to stay with Chris no matter what he chooses to do with the information: Chris could turn Joe in and leave his hometown, he could turn him in and stay, he could do nothing and leave, or he could do nothing and stay. I have chosen to fight for a life with Chris no matter what he chooses. In order to do this, I must compromise my morals. Kate must accept Larry's death so that Chris can be with me guilt-free. It is my responsibility to get Kate to wake up; Chris cannot do it. I made the decision that I have severed ties with my family to come here to be with Chris. Textually, I supported this decision with the fact that my mother is taking my father in when he gets out of jail. I cannot, will not live there with him. When I choose Chris over George at the end of Act Two, I sever ties with George. Without Chris, I am alone in the world, so not being with Chris is not an option. This makes my stakes the highest they can be for my fight against Kate and for Chris.

The director encouraged us at the end of tonight's exploration, saying we were working in the right direction and there would be nothing to add until we are off book.

January 11, 2008

This afternoon was devoted to a run-through of Act Three. It occurred to me that my emotionality with Kate is an obstacle to overcome in order to get what I want. I cannot let it win

or I will not have a future. The director asked the following questions of me: What is the urgency of my coming downstairs? What does it take to come down the stairs? What do I stand to lose or gain by coming down? Why do I wait so long to come down? These are all questions I have been mulling over and deserve more attention.

Tonight's rehearsal was a run-through of Act Two. I got several line notes from the director, things he couldn't hear. This is frustrating to me. I must find a greater need to communicate these things in order to generate more volume. I do not just want to speak more loudly. There needs to be a reason.

January 12, 2008

Today we ran the show for the first time. Overall it went well. The director's biggest note for me was my approach with Kate in Act Three. He wants me to come in stronger, to demand her acceptance of Larry's death, to destroy her with the line, "Larry is dead, Kate" (Miller 64). Then, after I see the destruction I can be devastated by it. Why do I push away from harsh, direct confrontation? This is a personal problem, not a choice I've made for Ann. Textually, there is no evidence to suggest Ann is hedging at all in the beginning of this scene. I will work to overcome this. Increasing the immediacy and importance of what I need will drive my direct attack on Kate. This will be the focus of my work over the weekend.

January 16, 2008

Tonight's rehearsal was spent combing through the details of Act One. Many of the director's notes had to do with picking up cues, taking out the pauses. He loved my choice to have wet fingernails at the top of Act One. Also, there were a few minor adjustments blocking-wise. These run-throughs with detailed note sessions afterwards are extremely productive in

helping us understand the arc of the show and the journey of our characters. So many discoveries are made in the doing of it. More work like this is on the schedule for tomorrow.

January 17, 2008

We continued detail work for Act One and Act Two. The director warned the entire cast about leg slaps and asked that we each find a specific place in Act Two to overcome the heat. I must admit, I had forgotten completely about environmental conditions. What an entirely necessary role the director has! Tomorrow we will run the show again. To prepare, I will review lines, blocking, and objectives for Act Three as it has been a couple of days since we visited it.

January 18, 2008

This run was my first opportunity to incorporate the director's note to be stronger in Act Three with Kate. I definitely have a grasp of what he wants now, however, I will probably get a note to back off a little in the future. My goal was to explore the strength fully, maybe even go too far, so that I did not get the same note again, and so that I could really experience what the director wants me to explore. The challenge will be finding the balance of strength and delicacy.

Also, we worked the Chris and Ann scene in which he proposes. What are the different tactics I can use to spur him to action? The director gave us the freedom to explore awkward silences in this scene. We also explored the polarities of having no hope for a future together versus the certainty of engagement, which both exist in this scene.

January 20, 2008

Today fight choreographer, Rex Austin Barrow, worked with us on the moment in Act Three when Kate grabs my wrists. We incorporated the text to get a feel for the overlap of physical action and dialogue that ensues. The director chose other moments to work as well. He asked me to think of the letter as an atom bomb. He reiterated his need for me to destroy Kate

with the news that Larry is dead. Within that, exploring the variation in first defeating her, pinning her down, and then destroying her reality. I feel I am not achieving the level of destruction the director is looking for. How to achieve it, is my main question at this point.

January 21, 2008

Tonight we focused only on Act Three, and the director asked me to go back to incorporating vulnerability with firmness in dealing with Kate. Although, I am confused now about exactly what he wants from me, I will continue to work as truthfully as I can incorporating both qualities in my actions. My goal will be to source completely off of Kate as soon as I reveal my intent to her. In revealing my intent, I will strongly destroy her illusion that Larry is still alive. After that, I'll let myself be softened or made vulnerable by her reaction/behavior. That's the best way I know how to interpret the director's notes at this point. I will wait to get feedback on this approach. Something I need to hold on to: I still care about them, I do not hate them, and if Chris decides to stay I need him to be okay with me.

January 22, 2008

Tonight's rehearsal was a tech-watch run-through. I am excited at the growth that is occurring in the show. The tightening of the action, the deepening of relationships and the confidence of the ensemble are all encouraging as we approach opening night. The run felt stagnant though, and I think it is because I am thinking too technically about blocking and lines. I need to find freedom from this. I feel lost in Act Three with Kate and the revelation of the letter. It's kind of comforting to be lost, though, because in past experiences a break-through usually emerges from uncertainty not certainty. The director and cast have created a wonderfully comfortable environment in which to explore. I feel completely free to go too far in one

direction and to fail in another direction and keep on exploring. I know this time of exploration is coming to a close soon, so making the best use of it is of utmost importance.

January 23, 2008

Thankfully, tonight's rehearsal was spent focusing on much of Act Three. The director asked that I just keep exploring with Kate in this moment with the letter. He challenged us to fight through the emotion/tears, if they come, to pursue our objectives. The emotion is an obstacle standing in the way of what I want. The hard part will be maintaining the struggle; having the emotion fully alive to fight against. If we become two strong women effortlessly fighting strongly with each other, no one cares. Love must be the buoy in this scene. There is so much to explore in this scene still.

We did some very technical work with sounds in this scene tonight. Kate's moans and my apologies create a sort of symphonic descent from the climax between us. Neither Emily Osborne, playing Kate, nor I have had much experience working from the outside in like this, but the director asked us to try it. It's exciting to try a new approach, and proved helpful in giving us an idea of the form the director trying to achieve in this moment.

I discovered a very helpful metaphor for this scene with Kate after discussing it with the director. It's as though I pushed her off the top floor of a skyscraper and immediately, frantically start throwing pillows down to soften her fall. The director warned that silence is dangerous after I've pushed her, so avoid waiting too long to start throwing pillows. This metaphor helped me to understand the duality of the absolute necessity of destroying Kate's illusion and the extreme guilt and sorrow that accompany that action.

January 24, 2008

In preparation for tonight's run, I reviewed the given circumstances of the play. Lately, I have been 'stuck in my head', which is a horrible place to be as an actor. My goal for tonight is to let go of all the notes, trusting the work I've done on them, and just listen and respond to everyone and everything in the moment incorporating all the given circumstances. Also, I revisited my super-objective of securing my future; imaging my way back through the last three and half years of hurt, disappointment, and loss, as well as rejuvenating my dream for an ideal life with the Kellers. I need to free myself physically and emotionally for this run.

Overall, my goal for tonight was accomplished. As a result, though, some of the blocking and lines were sacrificed. It is a balancing act of playing by the rules and letting go. It is a wonderful place to be one week before opening.

January 25, 2008

Tonight we did spot work with the director's notes from yesterday's run. New questions surfaced as we discussed the deepening of the stakes in Act Three. Have I or am I contemplating suicide? If it is true that I have nothing if I do not have a life with Chris, how did I get to this point? How badly has the grief and loneliness eaten away at me? Have I been medicated for depression? Can I rely on my mother at all? Is George caught up with only his own future? Why is Chris the only way out? A life with Chris can erase the sins of our fathers. Together we can move both families out from under the blanket of shame and heal the wound between the families. No other future could achieve this. Tonight, the realization that the love and admiration I have for Kate must match my need to destroy her false reality helped me to understand how to walk the "strength/vulnerability" tightrope that the director wants in the letter scene. In preparation for the next time we run this scene, I will spend time investing in the

memories I have with Kate. Was I the daughter she always wished she had? Did I secretly want her to be my mother at times growing up? How in love were both families with the idea of Larry and me marrying? Again, the stronger these ideas are living in me, the bigger the struggle it will be to destroy this woman I love so deeply.

January 28, 2008

Tonight's technical rehearsal still revealed new ideas for me, especially in Act Three with Chris. Chris rejects the idea of me going with him (Miller 66); even though I fight for us to be together, what does it do to me to hear him say this? The reality of the loneliness that is imminent if he refuses me must be living inside me as I fight. I know that loneliness. That loneliness threatened to destroy me once before, so how do I combat it now?

The director suggested I try a different tactic with my line to Kate, "I loved him. You know I loved him" (Miller 64). He suggested I plead with her. Also, "I'll do nothing about Joe" he asked that I be confident and firm but not yell. I am still exploring the strength and how it manifests itself in me, and I think he's guiding me into variations that I am not fully exploring yet. Again, I am so thankful for an outside eye.

January 29, 2008

Tonight was our first dress rehearsal with full costumes, makeup, and hair. Typical set-backs occurred as a result. Whenever some many new elements are added at once, my attention tends to lose focus. I am not worried, though, the groundwork has been done and the newness to all of the design elements will wear off.

In preparation for tonight's run I dropped in several memories in the Keller's backyard. I used several memories and photographs from my own childhood and substituted the characters in the play for my cousins and siblings. The richness of these memories is invaluable for me as

an actor and fitting in this situation. I feel very deeply about *everything* in this backyard so this exercise really helped me develop a relationship toward this environment. I made lists of what was the same and what had changed and how I felt about each.

Tonight I incorporated some of the previous notes I received from the director. I tried pleading with “I loved him” and really liked the effect it had on Kate (Miller 64). I tried facing downstage for “Larry is dead,” and it felt honest and right for that moment (64). This rehearsal process has been one of the most exploratory and relaxed experiences I have had. I know a variety of factors are responsible for this, but time has been a luxury we were afforded (because of Winter Break) that normally is not allowed in the theater. Time has allowed the truth of the given circumstances to fully take root in us and relieved some of the pressure that usually exists to get it right as soon as possible. We are two days from opening still playing with action/tactic options and there is no anxiety involved. I have been involved in productions that could afford no time to experiment and therefore suffered from the hard-line drive to the finished product. I believe everyone involved in this project knows we have a solid production and so is more willing to let go and experiment knowing that a deeper understanding will result from the freedom to play. It is incredible to be a part of this.

January 30, 2008

Tonight is our second dress rehearsal. In preparation, we reviewed notes from last night’s dress run. Last night I experimented with other, less intense tactics in Act Three and scared the director. His exact note was, “I’m very concerned that my note about yelling a line or two has reduced your totally appropriate and necessary intensity for the rest of the scene! Please talk to me about this.” This feels awful and is not at all where I would like to be one rehearsal

away from opening. I spoke too soon in my journal entry yesterday. Everyone is not okay with experimenting at this late date. I will increase my intensity tonight.

February 1, 2008

Last night's final dress rehearsal was cancelled due to a snow storm, but the feedback the director gave us after our second dress rehearsal has encouraged me that we are in a great place to share this story with an audience tonight.

I adjusted my intensity in the actions I played on Kate and Chris in Act Three, and it was exactly what he was looking for, as his note was simply, "brilliant." Whether or not this is the truth, it has given me the confidence I need to play with abandon in front of an audience tonight.

Tonight's show went incredibly well. My inner life was living fully and fueled especially my pursuit in Act Three. The audience enjoyed it. I need to be aware of laugh lines with Keller and Sue and hold for laughs.

February 2, 2008

Again, the preparatory work I did before and during tonight's show filled me up and gave me something to overcome in the intense scenes with Chris and Kate. I have incorporated some time alone on stage in my pre-show warm-up to relive memories in the back yard. I feel like this is helpful in creating a hot emotional furnace from which to interact with the other characters.

February 3, 2008

Today's matinee performance felt like a funeral. No one laughed. Audience participation is crucial in the success or failure of any show. We still pursued our objectives intensely and committed fully to our actions, but the loss of the audience was deeply felt. I am looking forward to the director's notes for our pick-up rehearsal on Tuesday.

February 5, 2008

Today we received the notes from last weekend's shows in preparation for the pick-up rehearsal tonight. One note is plaguing me: "Ann: your last entrance...has been most moving when you've come in on the verge of an emotional breakdown." As an actor, I know I cannot focus on emotionally breaking down. I must find the inner life that causes me to be on the verge of an emotional breakdown. But what is that? What if it works one night and not another? It is the age-old acting conundrum: how to find and hold onto inspiration? I do not feel confident in my ability to do this yet. Sometimes my imagination serves up the hottest, most provoking fuel to move me in the pursuit of my objective, and other times, it doesn't. The worst is when I become aware that my imagination is not inspiring the emotion to live inside me because desperation starts to settle in and that feels like death for me as an actor.

February 6, 2008

Tonight's show suffered from me not figuring out how to deal with the "emotional breakdown" note. Back stage before Act Three, I was doing moment-before work, but I was doing it with the hope that it would generate an emotional breakdown. I knew this was wrong, but I could not get it out of my head. With more experience, I am sure I will be able to relax through a note like that and do the work necessary to achieve it, but obviously I am not there yet. I felt cold in Act Three, emotionless. How to break out of this is the only thing I am focused on now.

February 7, 2008

Tonight's show produced more of the same anxiety in me approaching that moment in Act Three. I feel like screaming. I am trying too hard to control things I should not be trying to

control at all, but I am stuck. My imagination is being trumped by my over-critical brain. I need to figure out how to shut off my brain.

February 8, 2008

Today I received an individual email from the director. It was upsetting. Again, I received the note, “I think you’re doing marvelously (!), and had only this to give feedback on: in your 3rd act entrance, the feeling of tightrope-walking she experiences, striving to be strong while she feels so emotionally torn (about whether to share the letter, about how to help Chris, about what to do with Joe)—this tightrope could be still more taut, so she’s on the verge of an emotional breakdown throughout.” I do not know how to achieve this consistently.

In preparation for tonight’s show, I revisited all of my research: the pictures, the letters, the memories, etc., and I decided to throw the responsibility of an emotional breakdown out the window. I decided I would fight for my life in Act Three and let the chips fall where they may. As a result, I had the best show of the run thus far. I am learning.

February 9, 2008

Preparatory work for tonight’s show was the most-thorough it has been, imaginatively speaking, but my inner life lost some of its intensity in Act Three and the “verge of an emotional breakdown” was again absent. I fear I have no craft at all.

February 10, 2008

Acting is not about what I feel; it is about what I make the audience feel. I remind myself of this in preparation for today’s closing performance. I want to play with abandon one last time.

The cast, as a whole, had a wonderful time playing this afternoon. It was the perfect way to close a show.

E. A SUMMATION OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS

In conclusion, my trust that I can deliver a good performance most of the time has been reinforced: remembering lines and blocking, listening and responding truthfully to my partners on stage and playing within the reality of the given circumstances of the text. However, playing this role in the final semester of my graduate studies has also made me acutely aware that I have a lot to learn in terms of creating a consistent, emotionally rich, fully-alive-and-deeply-connected-in-the-moment character. It is my hope that experience, both in life and on stage, will help me mine the depths of artistic creation. That I feel unfinished as an actor at the culmination of this process is not bothersome. Rather, it is enlightening: inspiring me to keep learning, experimenting and striving for excellence.

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