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A Woman's Heart: Masters Thesis

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A WOMAN'S HEART: MASTER'S THESIS

A WOMAN'S HEART: MASTER'S THESIS

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

By

Marylynn Gwatiringa, BFA
Missouri Valley College, 2007

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Lindenwood University

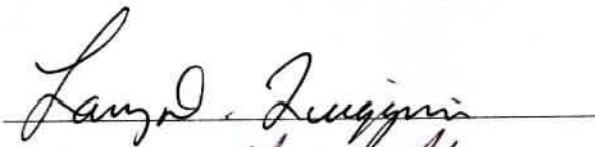
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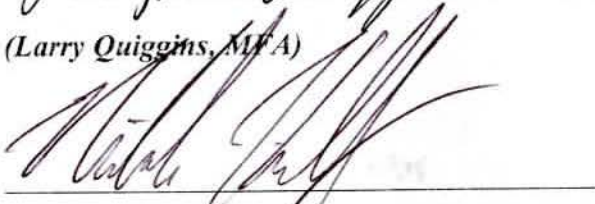


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(Nick Kelly, MFA)

ABSTRACT

A Woman's Heart is the pairing of two one-act plays to make a statement about women's resilience and their great capacity to forgive and love in the aftermath of a storm. Lynn Nottage's *Poof!* showcases a woman's plight and her eventual triumph over the hardship, whilst John Cariani's *Her Heart* continues the journey to show a woman opening up and loving again.

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- 4) Natalie Smith: The young man who was supposed to be the Stage Manager for my plays was quite unreliable, and I found myself scrambling to find a SM a mere week before the show. I had heard how great Natalie was at stage managing, as well as how personable she was so I asked her if she would mind stepping in so late in the game. Not only did she agree, but she went above and beyond, attending all of the remaining rehearsals,

(even though she didn't have to) and finding the song that I needed for one of my pieces. I was very blessed to have her, and I think she will be very successful in her field if she wishes to continue on in that path.

- 5) Nick Kelly: Mr. Kelly was a graduate student at Lindenwood not too long ago so that is probably one of the reasons why he relates so well to his students. His experiences in Los Angeles meant his advice was rooted in real experiences, not just what was in the text books. With an undergraduate degree in Musical Theatre, I also really welcomed his Acting for the Camera classes as they offered me a new skill. I found Nick incredibly approachable with a genuine love and concern for the well-being of his students so I went to him for advice a few times during my work on my thesis. I greatly appreciated the time he took to guide me and am also grateful that he agreed to be on my panel.
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Chapter One

Introduction

The first time I read the play *Poof!* by Lynn Nottage I fell in love with it. I was drawn in by its simplicity and humor and the fact that at its very core it dealt with an incredibly vital issue. There was no doubt in my mind that I wanted the opportunity to play the damaged woman that was its heroine. I had played an emotionally troubled and wronged woman in Euripides' tragedy *Medea*, but this character was unique to me because although she had been suffering, she was now in a strange, almost laughable situation. I relished the challenge of finding the seriousness and depth that that this woman was experiencing in such a short piece driven by a fantastical occurrence.

Once I decided that this would be part of my Thesis I realized that I wanted to make a statement about women's resilience and their great capacity to forgive and love in the aftermath of a storm. In *Poof!* I had a play that showcased a woman's plight with her eventually triumphing over the hardship. I needed a piece that would continue the journey to show a woman opening up and loving again. I found exactly that in *Her Heart*, a vignette from *Almost Maine*, a play by John Cariani.

Like *Poof!*, *Her Heart* is a strange and often humorous tale that also contains some serious undertones. I connected with Glory's boundless optimism and naiveté, and was drawn in by the way her relationship with East evolves in one night. John Cariani's beautifully whimsical tale helped me to complete the statement I wanted to make:

Women are remarkable beings that can go through tremendous heartbreaks, yet, they can manage not only to survive their predicaments, but also to forgive their tormentors, and still have

the capacity to love. Through *Poof!* and *Her Heart* I am able to showcase a journey that explores this process. Loureen is the before, while Glory is the after. These two characters represent the journey through a painful experience that is overcome and concludes with a hopeful new beginning.

As an actress I looked forward to the task of playing two multi-dimensional characters in such concise pieces. Both plays contain a dark nuance having to do with betrayal or physical abuse and have cleverly been given a lighthearted comic treatment. This meant that I would have the challenge of adequately exploring the light and the dark aspects of the plays, the subject matter, and the characters themselves.

Chapter Two

Script Analysis of *Poof!*

Geographical location: Climate: Date: Time of day

The author's note at the beginning of the play is a statistic specifically about Americans. This supports the notion that the play is set in America. The sole mention of *any* location is when Loureen talks about a time Samuel went to Reno, which of course tells us that they in fact are not in Reno (*Poof!*, 100). The play takes place in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The use of the words "Chile" and "Ya'll" support the notion of a southern setting, as well as a reference to dabbling in witchcraft. Beliefs in Wiccan practices are more prevalent in the south.

The script of *Poof!* states that the play is set in the present in a kitchen. The kitchen is in Loureen and Samuel's one bedroom apartment on the first floor of the apartment building. Loureen's friend, Florence, lives directly above them which is why Loureen asks her to "...come on down for a moment" (*Poof!*, 94). It is a slightly chilly October day and at one point Loureen grabs Samuel's jacket. The time of day is 4 pm as both women are preparing dinner.

Economic Environment

Loureen and Samuel make a very modest living. Samuel is the only one bringing in an income from his job at the local petroleum company; Weinkauf Petroleum Inc.

Social/Political Environment

Loureen is married to Samuel, an abusive and domineering man. Her neighbor and best friend is Florence. She lives in the same apartment building with her husband Edgar and their children, George and Thomas. Both women live with 'dictator' husbands, and have been

surrounded by a society that supports the notion of the woman being lowly all their lives. At one point Loureen says, "Everybody always told me, 'Keep your place Loureen'" (*Poof!*, 100).

Religious Environment

Both Loureen and Florence were raised in the Catholic Church, (supported by Loureen's mention of becoming a Saint) but Loureen stopped attending services shortly after marrying Samuel. She had begun to struggle with the idea of a God who would let her suffer. She still believes in God's existence, however, and the concept of heaven and hell which is why she makes reference to how she has damned Samuel to hell. Florence has continued to attend services at the local Baptist church, Oakland Memorial, sporadically. She fears the wrath of God and tells Loureen not to "...bring the Lord into this..." (*Poof!*, 96) at one point. She also frowns on the idea of Loureen dabbling in witchcraft and exclaims, "Oh sweet, sweet Jesus" (*Poof!*, 99).

Character Analysis

Loureen Paula Norwood was born and raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Her father left her mother when she was a baby, and her alcoholic mother constantly blamed her for her father's departure. An only child, Loureen very quickly learned to take care of herself, as her mother was constantly out looking for money, alcohol, or a boyfriend. When Loureen was only ten years old, her mother, Paula was somewhat in a stable place in her life. She had a job as a waitress at a local bar, and had found a man who actually seemed to be interested in staying with her past one night. Unfortunately, the stability was short lived. One night, Paula came home completely intoxicated and very angry. Her new beau had broken up with her at her job because he had found out about her many infidelities. The two had gotten into it at the bar causing her to get fired. Rejected and humiliated, Paula was out for blood when she staggered into the little

apartment she shared with her daughter at two o'clock in the morning. Little Loureen woke up to her mother violently shaking her. She sat up in her bed just in time to be shoved back down again. She tried to shrug off her sleepiness to better understand her mother's ranting and was met with more aggression as her mother shoved and swatted at her. Finally wide awake, Loureen scrambled away from her mother, fell out of the bed then crawled away. Her mother caught up to her in the living room, pinned her down on the couch, and then commenced to beat her. Loureen eventually blacked out because of all the beatings, but she remembered most of what her mother had been saying to her. She was lazy, ugly, and had not tried hard enough to keep her father, and now this new man around. It was because of Loureen that these men had left.

Shortly after this incident Loureen was moved to a foster home. She saw her mother a few times after that, but eventually the visits ceased. Determined to never be told she didn't try hard enough, Loureen went above and beyond with her chores, but kept to herself in her spare time.

Loureen met Florence in high school, and although Florence was much more outgoing and talkative, they both resided in foster homes and the two quickly bonded. A few months before their high school graduation, Florence excitedly introduced Loureen to her boyfriend Edgar. Although Edgar was eight years older than Florence, he seemed witty and fun and had a decent job at the local petroleum company. Edgar had brought his buddy and coworker Samuel with him and after introducing him to the girls, the four went out to celebrate the girls' impending graduation.

Samuel Jones was also eight years older than Loureen and very handsome, so initially she felt very intimidated. However as the evening progressed, she quickly fell under his spell. Edgar was rowdy and rambunctious, which was totally in sync with his young, vivacious girlfriend. Samuel, however, seemed more reserved and thoughtful. He opened doors for Loureen, asked her about her dreams, and sometimes sat with her in comfortable silence. Samuel and Loureen only courted for six months, and during that time Samuel seemed to become more demanding and less of a gentleman. The progression was subtle, however, so when he proposed Loureen jumped at the chance to have a life where somebody loved and wanted her.

Samuel did not take long to show his true colors. He had quickly ascertained that Loureen had insecurities about being good enough so he used that to control her. On top of beating her, he convinced her not to pursue her dreams of becoming a writer as that would interfere with her ability to be a good wife and homemaker. He also insisted that they wait to have kids since he was the only breadwinner and could not afford to support her as well as some children.

Up until the spontaneous combustion incident, Loureen spent most of her time caring for Samuel. Florence, Edgar, and their two children live in the same apartment building, so at times the couples hang out together. If Loureen is not cooking, cleaning, or hanging out with Florence, she watches television and daydreams about her true desires. No one, except Florence, knows about her witty sense of humor and how Loureen actually wanted to be a writer for television shows.

Loureen loves children and music, and her favorite thing to do is sit quietly on the balcony and watch nature in the afternoon. She hates dirt, loud noise, strong smells, and Samuel's spectacles. She says, "A pair of cheap spectacles, that's all that's left, and you know how much I hate these" (*Poof!*, 96). She associates them with intelligence and decency, and feels that since her husband is none of those things he shouldn't be allowed to wear them.

Desire: Loureen's desire is to be good enough, and to be loved for who she is. She has spent most of her life trying to please the people around her and is exhausted. Now she just wants peace, and time for her body and soul to heal.

Will: Up until the beginning of the play Loureen was very weak willed. However, after years of pushing, Loureen built up to having a very strong will to get out of her situation.

Moral Stance: Loureen is a fairly moral person. In fact, her 'right or wrong' meter seems to only be associated with her and not with the people around her. She tries her very best for others, and even feels guilty for what she has seemingly done to Samuel even though he ill-treated her for years.

Decorum: Loureen is 33 years old, and seemingly average looking. She is not skinny, nor is she overweight, but she has a beautiful curvy figure and a lovely medium chocolate complexion. The delicate beauty has had a few years added to her by years of physical and emotional abuse. She has dark, shoulder length hair that she mostly wears in a loose ponytail so that it doesn't interfere with her work. However, Loureen does have long, messy bangs that help to cover her occasional black eyes and dark circles. Loureen constantly plays with her hands and has bad posture from years of feeling inferior. At the end of the piece her back seems to straighten with her acceptance of her new found freedom.

Chapter Three

Script Analysis of *Her Heart*

Geographical location; Climate; Date; Time of day

As stated at the beginning, this play is set in the fictional town of Almost, in the state of Maine. The entire piece takes place in the front yard of an old farmhouse. It is late in the evening as East was about to go to bed. It is November and the weather is cold enough that East comes out with a coat on top of his plaid pajamas.

Economic Environment

East says that their town did not get around to getting organized so they are not even technically a town. He is also a repairman who lives in an old farmhouse on an old potato farm. This supports the theory that neither the town, nor East are extremely wealthy. Glory is of a middle class lifestyle but the medical bills related to her heart surgery and the time away from her job set her back financially, which is why she needs to camp in a stranger's back yard on her trip.

Social/Political Environment

Glory comes from a part of the country "...that's a little closer to things." When she says this she is describing the cramped nature of Brooklyn, New York compared to being out in Almost where she admires the vastness and openness. Although Glory is a stranger, and is trespassing, East is incredibly kind to her. He is a loner by nature and likes to keep to himself. He is from a small town that is conservative, but he is a curious, easy-going and open-minded individual, as evidenced by his patience with Glory. He lives alone, has never been married and has no children, which is why he kisses Glory quite openly.

Religious Environment

Neither Glory or East are religious but Glory is very open to mysticism and spirituality, which is why she believes in the legend that says that the Northern Lights are, "...really the torches that the recently departed carry with them so they can find their way to heaven..."(*Almost Maine*, 19).

Character Analysis

Glory Elena Robbins was born in Indianapolis, Indiana. Her father died from prostate cancer when she was only three years old, but she remembers that he would often bounce her on his knee and sing to her in his deep baritone. Her mother, Frida, was a free spirit who loved nature and made and sold jewelry for a living. When Glory's father died, Frida picked up her daughter and moved to Brooklyn, New York, to live with her sister who had a store called *Detendre* (which means to relax or ease) there. Although the city's condensed nature was the opposite of Frida's personality, she felt that helping her sister with her meditation and relaxation store would help to heal some of the hurried citizens of the New York area.

Glory grew up surrounded by her mother and aunt's positive nature. Although her father had passed, her mother continued to believe in their love and she often talked to Glory's father in the wind and in the sky. Glory's bedtime stories ranged from fairy tales to Wiccan stories, to books on the Northern Lights and Greek mythology. She therefore grew up with an open mindedness about magic and legends as well as being a hopeless romantic.

When Glory was 23 years old her mother and aunt died in a tragic car accident on their way home from a spiritual retreat in Quebec. Although Glory was left all alone with no family, she believed that her mother and aunt had at least gotten the opportunity to take part in rituals at the retreat that would pave the way for their afterlife. Glory took their passing as a part of life,

grieved, and then tried to move on. She continued to run *Detendre* by herself, and on the anniversary of her mother and aunt's death a year later, Wes walked into her store. Glory saw this as a sign, and the two married a year later.

Wes was a chef at a local restaurant, and after they married he moved into Glory's apartment on top of the store. During their marriage Glory tried to be a good wife; loving, generous, positive and upbeat. It was perhaps this perkiness that Wes may have tired of because the woman he started seeing behind Glory's back was a very serious stockbroker. Camilla thought Wes could be much more than just a chef and she demanded he leave Glory, move into her Penthouse, and immediately start taking business classes. Wes liked how Camilla took charge and began to see his wife's constant affection as stifling, and her attempts at understanding him as nagging. Once he left Glory however, he found his new love to be bossy, domineering, and inconsiderate. He realized that she just wanted a puppet that she could mold into whatever she wanted, and he immediately realized he had made a mistake.

When Wes left Glory, her world was truly shattered because she really believed that she had found love, and that they were happy. She constantly tried to be supportive and understanding of her husband, so finding out that he was unhappy confused and pained her deeply. After going through the devastation of Wes leaving her, then the pain and guilt of his death, going to find the Northern Lights was the one thing Glory felt like she could hold onto to take her back to who she was, or else she would just fall apart.

Glory loves nature, art and music. She adores and wants children but feels that she needs to spend a couple of more years in the city, helping people through the store. After that she

wants to move to the country to raise her children in an open, healthy, less cluttered environment. She hates closed mindedness, intolerance, and cruelty.

Desire: Glory's desire is to be happy and to heal the world. She knows that she cannot fix everyone, but by running a store that helps people to relax and find inner peace, she hopes to at least get the ball rolling. She wants the kind of love her parents had, the kind of love she read about in fairy tales. Her ultimate goal would be to spend the rest of her life on a farm with her husband and children, and to always be doing something that would be contributing to healing the universe.

Will: Glory is very strong willed. She is an incredibly passionate person who was so determined to correct the situation with her husband that she travelled all the way to Northern Maine and camped in a stranger's back yard!

Moral Stance: Glory is a very moral person. However, just like Loureen, her moral compass seems to only detect her faults and not the people around her. Wes cheated on her, yet here she is feeling incredibly guilty and wanting to make peace for something she is not responsible for.

Decorum: Glory is 28 years old, average size, with a curvy figure. Her face is always glowing as she is constantly smiling. She normally dresses like a flower child in long flowing dresses and skirts, with sandals and flowers in her hair. However, when she travels to Maine she is on a serious mission so she pulls her hair back and puts on what she deems appropriate Maine wear. Glory picks an ivory colored winter outfit because white and ivory are among her most favored colors. Glory believes in walking towards the light, and she believes in people constantly striving to be better, purer, and lighter.

Chapter Four

Lynn Nottage

Lynn Nottage was born in 1964 and grew up in the Boerum Hill area of Brooklyn, New York. Inspired by the women around her, her mother, grandmother, nurses, teachers, activists and artists in the neighborhood where she grew up, she had written her first play by the time she was eight years old (“Lynn Nottage Biography” *The Historymakers.com*). She seemed to be surrounded by the “writer” vibe as she happened to take the subway to high school every day with Jonathan Lethem, the novelist who wrote of the gentrification of her neighborhood in Fortress of Solitude.

In 1982 she earned her diploma from New York's High School of Music and Art where she penned *The Darker Side of Verona*, the story of an African American Shakespearean company. She went on to attend Brown University, majored in American Literature and creative writing, and earned a BA with honors in 1986. In 1989 she got an MFA in playwriting from Yale School of Drama, and after graduating she returned to New York and began working for Amnesty International where she served as interim communications director and press representative (Women Playwrights of Diversity, 260).

Nottage said she took the job immediately after graduating from Yale Drama School because she felt as though she had spent her entire life in school and needed an alternative experience. I personally relate to this very strongly as I have spent six of the past seven years getting my undergraduate and graduate degrees. Upon my second graduation, my father suggested I go all the way by continuing onto a doctorate degree. Although this would be a very beneficial step, I felt, like Nottage, that it was time for an alternative experience.

It was while Nottage was having this alternative experience that she was inspired to write the play with which I fell in love. She had been working for Amnesty International for about four years when a photographer brought in some very provocative images of women from a battered women's shelter. She went to her boss and asked if there was something they could do, but at that time, their mandate did not encompass domestic abuse.

At that moment, Nottage knew that she had to write about those faces, and she sat down at 10 o'clock at night in her office, and wrote *Poof!* She submitted it to the Actors Theater of Louisville, where it won a competition and was then performed ("Esteemed Playwright Named 2007 'Genius.'" *npr.org*).

Being an organization that is about human rights, it is no wonder that working for Amnesty International affected Nottage. This quote was in a program note for her award winning play, *Poof!*:

Rather than discovering through her work material for her writing, Lynn found it difficult to deal with the issues she confronted daily. Thus Lynn places her work into two categories: "pre- Amnesty" and "post-Amnesty." Before her affiliation with AI her style was what she describes as "heavy and dramatic." Since then, though her plays deal with the same basic issues, she treats them "lighter and with more humor." This shift in perspective occurred through her need to divorce herself in some way from the emotional drain of other people's suffering which she experienced at work. (*Women Playwrights of Diversity*, 160).

I found this to be incredibly true as I read Nottage's plays. She may deal with some very heavy topics like domestic abuse or civil war, but she manages to find humor where it is needed without diminishing the seriousness of the issue being discussed.

There is a great diversity to her work; we see a timid seamstress in one piece then a wild *madam* in another. One play is set in New York in 1905, while the other is set in the present day Democratic Republic of Congo. Her heroines are also very different, which is perhaps why people feel they can relate to her work. She explores a wide range of personalities, from the demanding but lonely queen in *Las Meninas* to the timid and nervous wife in *Poof!*

Though Nottage appears to specifically write about the black woman's struggle, her plays feature plenty of characters of multiple races and her writing leaves plenty of room for her protagonists to be of any race. What needs to be noted is that she brings female issues to light. In her Author's Statement in the book *The Fire This Time: African American Plays for the 21st Century*, Nottage says that her writing is an outgrowth of her curiosity, that,

...the magnificent thing about curiosity is that it's limitless. It is not bound by convention; it is not confined or predictable. In fact it has taken me in inexplicable directions, and given shape to the cantilevered architecture of my work. It's perhaps the reason my characters are always questioning and challenging the world within which they live (*The Fire This Time: African American Plays for the 21st Century*, 337).

A few years ago, Ms. Nottage moved back to her childhood home to take care of her mother, who was dying of Lou Gehrig's disease. Since her mother's death, Ms. Nottage has remained, living with her father, husband and young daughter, Ruby, named after her mother, in the family brownstone.

I began writing when I was very young. I grew up in a family of storytellers. My grandmother was a phenomenal storyteller, and I think if she lived in a different generation, she probably would have written for the stage or she would have written novels. So I think that I came to writing through my family and through this desire to tell the stories of my grandmother, of my mother, of friends of mine ("Esteemed Playwright Named 2007 'Genius.'" *npr.org*).

Chapter Five

John Cariani

Born in Brockton, Massachusetts, John Cariani grew up in Presque Isle, Maine and went to Presque Isle High School. He acquired a BA in History from Amherst College and then in late 1995 he moved to New York City to pursue an acting career. Once there he worked with the Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival and acted in off- and off-off-Broadway plays, television commercials, and films (“John Cariani” *Wikipedia*).

It was four years after this move that he got his first break. He was cast in the off-Broadway play, *It's My Party (And I'll Die if I Want To)*, starring Academy Award winner F. Murray Abraham. However, his first actual Broadway role was the part of Motel in the *Fiddler on the Roof* revival. He won a 2004 Outer Critics Circle Award and was nominated for a 2004 Tony Award for Best Featured Actor in a Musical.

Like most actors, Cariani did not only pursue a career on stage. He also starred in film and television. In 2000, Cariani was cast in the independent film, *Scotland, PA*, opposite Christopher Walken. He later landed a small role in the independent hit, *Kissing Jessica Stein*. In 2001, he played an unlikely villain in *Showtime*, a Warner Brothers release starring Robert DeNiro. Of all his television credits, his most successful was his role on *Law and Order*. He joined the cast in 2002 and played CSU Tech Julian Beck from 2002-2007. “Cariani began a career as a playwright when he ran out of audition material and started writing his own” (“John Cariani Biography.” *Broadway World*).

Just as his first time on Broadway had been an extremely successful venture, his first play, *Almost Maine* did incredibly well and was featured in Smith and Kraus' *New Playwrights: Best*

Plays of 2006. The play premiered at Portland Stage Company where he saw his first play and first decided to become an actor. *Almost Maine* broke all attendance and box-office records, and was named one of the ten best plays of the 2004/2005 regional theatre season by The Wall Street Journal. It opened Off-Broadway in 2006 and has been produced by 300 theatres all over America and in other countries such as Mexico, South Korea, Canada, Germany, the United Arab Emirates, and Australia. Cariani's second play, *Cul-de-sac*, a Transport Group production, premiered off-Broadway in the spring of 2006 ("John Cariani Biography." *Broadway World*).

Cariani seems to have a thing for stories with characters that are all somehow connected. In the fashion of the movies *Love Actually* and *Valentine's Day*, both his plays *Almost Maine* and *Cul de sac* feature multiple, intertwined characters. The *Curtain Up* review points this out,

John Cariani's second play is like a dark twin to his charming fledgling playwriting venture, *Almost Maine*. The characters in both plays are connected by their location. However, instead of the quirky humor and bracing sense of hope that overhung the residents of the wintry Maine town of Almost (similar to the one in which Cariani grew up), the three couples living in adjoining houses of a suburban cul-de-sac in anywhere USA are bound together less by a sense of place than a growing feeling of despair and displacement ("A Curtain Up Review, *Cul-de-sac*." *Curtain Up*).

Like most songs ever composed, *Almost Maine's* main theme is love. It deals with the common theme in a rather refreshing way though, by having these little quirky, magical snippets. Upon reading, I loved the entire play and would love to do it one day, but I was looking for something short and sweet, and the second vignette, *Her Heart*, was perfect!

Cariani started writing when he ran out of audition material. There are a million plays in the world; therefore there are a billion monologues. Perhaps he ran out of audition material that

was fresh but natural, magical but realistic. If this is what he was looking for, he certainly found it when he wrote this play. There is a realism that we, as an audience can relate to. *Almost Maine* is set in a small northern town, has regular Joes as its stars, and they are all dealing with, or looking for love, a scenario we can all relate to.

In 2009, John joined the cast of the television show *Numb3rs* on CBS as physicist Otto Bahnoff. In 2010, he will be featured in the independent film, *Elephant Sighs*, starring Ed Asner. And in late 2010, he hopes to be heading back to Broadway in a new musical called *Minsky's*, starring opposite Saturday Night Live alumna Rachel Dratch (“John Cariani” *Wikipedia*).

I started writing just to have a creative outlet during the down time. There's always down time when you're an actor ... I also complained once to my mother that I wasn't too keen about a lot of the new plays I was seeing in New York—too New York-centric, I thought, and there's a lot more world out there than just New York City. And she said, well don't complain about that unless you're willing to do something about it! So I tried my hand at doing something about it, and now ALMOST, MAINE is opening! (“John Cariani.” *Wikipedia*).

Chapter Six

Poof! vs Her Heart

Although these two pieces come from two completely different places, I really believe that they work together perfectly in relation to my thesis. As I mentioned in my first chapter, I wanted to do pieces that would highlight women's resilience and their great capacity to forgive and love in the aftermath of a storm. *Poof!* showcased a woman's plight and her eventual triumph. *Her Heart*, in essence, continued the journey showing a woman opening up and loving again.

Setting

Poof! is set in Tulsa, Oklahoma, while *Her Heart* is set in Almost, Maine. *Poof!* is in the kitchen of an apartment, and *Her Heart* is in the front yard of a farm house. The former play has more furniture, (tables and chairs) as well as set pieces and props (a trash can, broom and dust pan, telephone, plates, silver ware, glasses, a bottle of sherry, etc.). The latter play is more minimalistic with only a bench, Glory's bag and map. The only similarities are that the action in both these plays stays in one place the whole time.

The other characters

In *Poof!* we see Loureen interacting with her best friend, someone she has known most of her life and interacts with constantly. However, in *Her Heart*, Glory interacts with a total stranger. Florence is the same age as Loureen, has a husband and two children, and is also an unhappy housewife. East is 35, single, and a handyman. He is a good man, but quiet and a little

shy, so he has never really had the courage to pursue anyone. He also has never met anyone who lit a fire in him, which is what happens when he meets Glory. Although he cares about people and helps out anybody in the town when he can, he mostly sticks to himself. Florence is chatty and lively, while Wes is quite and thoughtful. What is similar about these two is that they are both concerned people. They genuinely care about what is happening to the protagonist in the piece.

Leading Ladies

Loureen has been put down most of her life; therefore she has very low self-esteem. She never knew her father, and her mother ill-treated her. Glory on the other hand, had a life surrounded by a lot of love. Although her father died when she was young, he loved her and her mother. Glory was also close to her mother and aunt before they passed. Loureen did not get a chance to pursue her dreams of becoming a writer or of having children. Her husband dictated how her life would be run. Glory, on the other hand, was working towards her dreams. She was running a store that was in line with her beliefs and up until her husband's infidelity, thought she was happily married.

Because of her background and environment, Loureen is, overall, a demure person who allows her husband to dictate her life. She wants to please him and feels that if she was to stand up to him, he might leave her just like her father, and at her age no one would want her or take her in. Glory is overall a very happy, open minded person. She is a great romantic and at times quite naïve. Although very different, both women are incredibly resilient. Loureen is a survivor. It takes great strength to deal with what she has been through in her childhood, as well as her marriage. Glory has experienced a lot of losses, yet she still soldiers on.

Story Line

At the beginning of *Poof!* we see Loureen having reached a boiling point, which results in her cursing her husband. The rest of the play is her realizing and dealing with the ramifications of her action. Glory, on the other hand, has already experienced an epic event and is now on a journey to try and rectify what she sees is her fault. Loureen starts out petrified and panicked, and spends most of the play that way. She eventually accepts what has happened. Glory starts out hopeful that she will find the peace she needs, and she goes through a series of emotions in her journey before finally finding what she was searching for and more. Both women were not expecting what happened to them, and both of them felt guilty for situations where they were the victim. By the end of their pieces, they have found closure, empowerment, and most importantly, hope.

Chapter Seven

Domestic Violence

“Nearly half the women on death row in the United States were convicted of killing abusive husbands. Spontaneous combustion is not recognized as a capital crime”(Poof!,91).

This is the author’s note that precedes the script of *Poof!* This witty sentence embodies Nottage’s writing style; cleverly humorous while bringing forth an important issue. In this case Nottage is making a statement about domestic violence. It was while working for Amnesty International that Nottage was inspired to write this piece. A photographer brought in some very provocative images of women from a battered women's shelter. She went to her boss and asked if there was something they could do, but at that time their mandate didn't encompass domestic abuse. *Poof!* was written soon afterwards (“Esteemed Playwright Named 2007 'Genius.’” *npr.org*).

The National Center for Victims of Crime defines domestic violence as, “the willful intimidation, assault, battery, sexual assault or other abusive behavior perpetrated by one family member, household member, or intimate partner against another” (“Domestic Violence” *The National Center for Victims of Crime*).

Domestic violence was not an issue I was particularly passionate about before I read *Poof!*. It was not that I did not care about my fellow women being beaten up, but I was not actively an advocate for domestic violence prevention. If the topic ever came up, I would express great disdain at the idea of a person inflicting harm upon another, be it man, woman, or

child, but other than that, I rarely thought about it. Reading this play made me pay more attention to this issue. I was specifically drawn to the emotional turmoil the main character suffered. Although she experienced physical damage, her emotional bruises were deeper and would take longer to heal. Emotional scars run very deep, and some people never recover from them.

Having said that, I do not wish to downplay the level of harm physical abuse does to people. Not only have some people been crippled by abuse, but some have actually lost their lives to domestic violence. Looking through books on domestic violence, I came across some alarming statistics. In the prologue to Domestic Violence: The Circle Called Love, the author mentions a case where a Lambertville, New Jersey woman who was choked and beaten so severely by her husband that she miscarried their unborn baby. She was only one of approximately 1.4 million people who require medical treatment each year for injuries caused by domestic violence (Domestic Violence: The Circle Called Love, 3).

Looking at all the centers, organizations, and movements dedicated to preventing domestic violence, and how far women have come in terms of asserting themselves, it is very interesting to note how great the number is of women who still experience domestic violence. This is proof that abuse is very much rooted in the psyche.

A large number of victims of abuse are professional, modern day women who appear to be strong, intelligent, and confident. However, when they fall in love and their partner turns out to be abusive, they seem to react to their plight in a way that seems to be contradictory to their characters.

Some women easily fall into abusive relationships because they come from a background that supports the idea of the man being the dominant one in the relationship, be it their countries of origin, religious beliefs, or simply how they were raised. Nevertheless, it is the women who do not come from a submissive culture that that I find particularly fascinating. How do they go against their natural instincts and concede to such condescending treatment? The answer seems to be rooted in the muscular organ that lies within our chest cavity: the heart.

I personally think that one of the reasons independent women end up in these situations is because their abusers do not start off as monsters. They start off as charming, gracious, seemingly kind and loyal men. Just as most men have the natural instinct to protect; women tend to have the natural instinct to be devoted nurturers. If a woman's child misbehaves, she does not desert him, but stands by his side till he corrects his behavior. Some women tend to take this stance with their abusers. They love them so much that they believe them when they say that they will not ever hurt them again, or that they will change. Even if the abusers do not make this pledge, these women believe in their hearts that the man they fell for, the man who made them happy, will revert back to his initial persona.

Unfortunately, most men who abuse their partners do not change and continue to hurt, use, and degrade these women till they either leave or die. Fortunately, *Poof!* is about a woman who finally gets out of her situation, albeit, in an unusual way. The interesting thing is that Loureen gets rid of Samuel at the very beginning of the piece. She spends the rest of the play figuring out what comes next. Just like convicts who get out of jail and struggle with assimilating into a regular life, Loureen stumbles around for a while, panicking about how to deal with her new found freedom.

There are several steps a woman has to take once she gets out of an abusive relationship to help her move on with her life and avoid going back to her abuser. Nottage cleverly shows us some of these stages in her very short piece. We see Loureen panic about being arrested and convicted of her husband's murder,

"I'm a killer, I'm a killer, I'm a killer" (*Poof!*, 98).

"You think they'll lock me up? A few misplaced words and I'll probably get the death penalty, isn't that what they do with women like me, murderesses?" (*Poof!*, 98)

We also see her reminiscing about both the bad and the good times. It is her recounting of these bad times that bring her to the point where she realizes that the situation was coming to a head, and if it had not been her husband it, "It would have been me eventually" (*Poof!*, 102).

At the end of Nottage's little masterpiece, we see Loureen finally, reluctantly, accept her freedom. I came across this quote at the end of the book, *It's My Life Now: Starting Over After an Abusive Relationship or Domestic Violence*, and I pictured this being said to Loureen As she gets rid of Samuel's ashes and sits down to eat her dinner.

The transition from an abusive or violent relationship to your new, confident, safe, and abuse-free life is an exciting yet difficult journey. You are re-creating your true self as you grow and move beyond your insecurities, confusion, self-doubts, fear, and dread. You are, in a most basic sense, transporting yourself from a kind of terrible darkness into the dawn of hope and optimism. This is just the beginning of a journey. You are working on yourself and your life. You are changing (*It's My Life Now: Starting Over After an Abusive Relationship or Domestic Violence*, 223).

This, I think supports what I loved about this piece, and hoped to instill in the audience.

Hope.

Chapter Eight

The Northern Lights

“And, see, the northern lights – did you know this? – the northern lights are really the torches that the recently departed carry with them so they can find their way to heaven...” (*Her Heart*, 19)

This is what Glory says to East in *Her Heart* when she is explaining why she is sitting in his front yard waiting for the Northern Lights. This is just one of the many legends people tell about the Northern Lights. There are quite a few, and most of them are incredibly enchanting, just like this little magical play.

Typically occurring in the ionosphere, these natural light displays in the sky are usually observed at night, particularly in the Polar Regions. In the north, they are known as the Aurora Borealis, named after Aurora, the Roman goddess of dawn, and the Greek name for the north wind, Boreas. They were given this name by Pierre Gassendi, a French philosopher. (“Pierre Gassendi.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*) Its southern counterpart, the Aurora Australis or the southern polar lights, has similar properties, but is only visible from high southern latitudes in Antarctica, South America, or Australasia. *Australis* is the Latin word for “of the South” (*The Northern Lights*, 195).

The beliefs surrounding the Auroras are both positive and negative, such as precursors of royal births on one hand, and of war and famine on the other. People have been fascinated with them for years, and according to a web exhibits website, the oldest descriptions of the aurora are

from the Mediterranean countries and from ancient China. Here are some of the stories I found most fascinating.

The Aurora Australis, or Southern Lights, were understood by the aboriginal Australians to be the dancing of the gods. The aboriginals of Scandinavia, the Sámi, feared and respected the aurora, and placed Auroral symbols on their magic drums, believing that the Northern Lights had supernatural powers to resolve conflicts (“Legends and Myths of the Aurora.” *Folklore*).

In the British Isles, the Northern Lights were known as the "nimble men" or the "merry dancers," names belying the fact that auroras were seen as clans at war, and the red light as blood spilt in violent battle (“Legends and Myths of the Aurora.” *Folklore*).

In Norse mythology, a bridge named Bifrost connected Earth and Ásgard, the home of gods. It most likely was modeled after rainbows or the Northern Lights, and was guarded by the god Heimdall (“Legends and Myths of the Aurora.” *Folklore*).

Some attributed the aurora to reflections from the shields of the Valkyries, warlike women chosen by Odin to guide fallen warriors to Valhalla. Others believed their glow came from the beautiful Viking goddess Freja, riding horseback (“Legends and Myths of the Aurora.” *Folklore*).

In Greenland, the aurora was seen as the highest level in the afterlife, with good weather and easy hunting. The moving lights were thought to be spirits playing ball games with the skull of a walrus. However, the Nunivak islanders had the opposite belief – that the skull was human, and that the ball players were the spirits of walruses (“Legends and Myths of the Aurora.” *Folklore*).

This is where the legends start to get a little disturbing:

Another Greenland belief was that the ball players were the souls of young babies, playing with their afterbirths (“Legends and Myths of the Aurora.” *Folklore*).

Scandinavian popular belief linked the aurora to dead women, especially to dead virgins (“Legends and Myths of the Aurora.” *Folklore*).

Auroral sightings have been associated with bad omens, such as the bombing of Pearl Harbor (“Legends and Myths of the Aurora.” *Folklore*).

Up until the Enlightenment of the 18th century, the Northern Lights often were viewed with fear or reverence and were related to contemporary concepts of heaven and hell. Many still claim that an aurora is audible as hissing and cracking, although there is no scientific evidence to support this (“Legends and Myths of the Aurora.” *Folklore*).

It is this mysticism associated with the Northern Lights that I feel transcends into John Cariani’s play. Although East seems to be the “normal” character at the beginning of the piece, he is soon taken up by the magic of the night and finds himself doing things completely out of character, like kissing a total stranger! This is why I firmly believe that Cariani chose the perfect elements for his story. The geographical setting allows for the viewing of the Northern Lights, and in turn, the Lights and their mystic legends support the strange, but romantic events that take place.



The Valkyrior are warlike virgins, mounted upon horses and armed with helmets and spears. When they ride forth on their errand, their armour sheds a strange flickering light, which flashes up over the northern skies, making what men call the "aurora borealis", or "Northern Lights" ("10 Stunning Images and Legends of the Northern Lights – Aurora Borealis." Chilloutpoint).

Chapter Nine

A Woman's Heart

I spent 25 years of my life suffering from low self-esteem, and when I finally got over it, I managed to find love. It was wonderful to realize that what people had been telling me for years was true. "How did I expect someone else to love me, if I didn't love myself?" I was incredibly happy for 3 months until... I got my heart broken. The experience sent me spiraling into a serious depression. I had spent years struggling with my self-worth, and feeling so unloved, that when I found love it felt like everything had finally fallen into place.

During my depression nothing mattered to me. When family and friends told me how beautiful and wonderful I was, it didn't matter. When I got a good job, it didn't matter. When a couple of perfectly respectable, young men were interested in me, it didn't matter either. My confused and bruised heart just wanted the bliss I had experienced so briefly with this particular person.

Not long after our dramatic, heart wrenching break up, the great love of my life reached out to me wanting to reconcile. I knew that it was a horrible idea, so much so that I told no one of my intentions to get back together with him. In my mind, I knew that I should not give the relationship another try, in fact, I had dreams warning me of what would happen if I ventured down that road again.

Now, I like to think of myself as a relatively intelligent person, a person who is not a masochist and attempts to make smart decisions every day. However, I chose to get back together with him. I ignored everything around me that was screaming at me to run in the other direction, and I boldly chose to follow my heart into the lion's den.

Needless to say, within a few weeks, my heart was figuratively ripped out of my chest. It is because of this experience that I realized two immensely important things. Firstly, that I now understand how a person can stay in a situation that all others deem bad for her. Secondly, that love is incredibly powerful. A woman's heart can empower her to heal the world, or it can cause her to self-destruct.

As I mentioned in my very first chapter, I think women as a whole have been unfairly treated for years. However, we as women must sometimes share in the responsibility for our ill treatment. I once heard someone say that a bully will continue to pick on a person because they will let them. I think that this can be said of a lot of situations where a person is being domineering and condescending. A lot of times, what will give the dominant party the confidence to continue their behavior, is the simple fact that they are getting away with it!

When I chose to do *Poof!* and *Her Heart* for my Thesis I not only wanted to highlight two examples of ill-treated women, I also wanted to show that they were vulnerable, flawed human beings. Often times abused women are portrayed as wimpy damsels in distress, blameless and weak. It was important to me to show that though these particular women deserved better, they also made bad choices. Loureen chose to stay with her husband after every beating. Glory felt guilty for what happened to Wes, even though *he* left *her*.

I personally think that they were led to those decisions by their beautiful, forgiving, hopeful hearts. This seems like such a mushy, girly, undignified thing to say, but I honestly sincerely believe that is the case. Although we want to believe that most of the world is run by smart, logical decisions made using people's brains, the truth is that a lot of those decisions are swayed and affected by what is in our hearts, what we feel. People marry and spend the rest of

their lives with someone they *love*. People tend to study what they enjoy so that they can spend their professional lives in a field they *love*. People pay money for entertainment they take pleasure in, and often *love*. We are surrounded by a lifestyle based on people and things we have chosen because of how we felt about them.

My point is that the heart is a powerful thing, and in this particular case, a *Woman's Heart* is an immensely powerful thing. Though often looked down upon and written off as weak, women are amazing resilient beings. History has many, wonderful examples of women who have overcome adversity to become great leaders, motivators, and pinnacles of inspiration to others. Many, if not all of them were moved to do the incredible things they did because they had an inconceivable amount of love for a particular issue, children, their race, nature, the world, or themselves.

“Joan of Arc so strongly believed in, and loved God and her people, that she risked her life leading the French army to several important victories during the Hundred Years' War, and was indirectly responsible for the coronation of Charles VII” (The 100 Most Influential Women of All Time, 192).

“Harriet Tubman so loved her people that she risked her life using the Underground Railroad to rescue more than 70 slaves during the time of slavery” (The 100 Most Influential Women of All Time, 192).

“Frida Kahlo was not afraid to express herself and so loved painting that she created magnificent art that not only put her country on the map, but it also encouraged and inspired feminists in their quest for equality” (The 100 Most Influential Women of All Time, 279).

“Billie Holiday had such a passionate love for music that her work enabled her to become an important building block for American jazz music. She also broke racial barriers by working with and performing for white people” (The 100 Most Influential Women of All Time, 321).

“Mother Teresa had so much compassion and love for the poor, sick, and orphaned that she founded missionaries and inspired others to do humanitarian work” (The 100 Most Influential Women of All Time, 116).

These are all examples of women who, in a world dominated by men, managed to follow their hearts to do great things. Although Glory and Loureen don't do anything as big as founding a missionary, or lead an army to victory, they did have enough strength to hold on when things got tough, then follow their hearts towards a better situation.

Chapter Ten

Casting

Months before I had even decided what play I wanted to do for my Thesis, I asked Nick Moramarco to be involved. I had met Nick in one of my graduate classes upon first coming to Lindenwood and immediately got along with him. Not only were we on the same page most of the time in our classes, but I also enjoyed and was impressed by his work as a director and an actor.

I also knew that I wanted one other person to be involved in this process, and that was my beloved professor, Marsha Parker. She had taken such great care of me since coming to the university, mentally and emotionally. Not only did she push me academically, but she is the only person that sat down with me and managed to help me figure out the root of my paralyzing stage fright.

Once my plays were picked, it was merely a matter of figuring out who would go where. Marsha graciously agreed to direct Nick and I in *Her Heart*, and Nick agreed to do double duty by also directing *Poof!*

So all that was left was to find my costar for *Poof!* Initially I had wanted Marsha to be in this role. When that had not worked out, my next thought had been Becca Helms, an extremely talented senior who had directed me in my first one act at Lindenwood. Unfortunately, she was heavily involved in her own projects, so I did not even ask her. I decided to attend the One Act Auditions in hopes that I would find my actress there. The auditions took place in Jelkyl Theatre on the 10th of February from 4pm to 6pm.

We saw quite a few people, and they were mostly very talented. Having only ever directed a couple of things during my undergraduate degree, I never really get to be on the casting side of things. It was very interesting to sit there deciding what looks and personalities would fit into my piece. It was scary to think that I could pick someone because their monologue made them seem perfect for the role, then once we started rehearsing, discover they had little to no range. Meanwhile, the person who would have been ideal was not picked because they were having a bad day, or they picked the wrong monologue. Fortunately, Nick was there to help with the casting, seeing as he was the one directing the piece.

It was actually because of Nick that we ended up with Ali. I liked her look for the part, but felt that her monologue needed some work. Nick assured me that he could work with her and get her to where we needed her to be, so we offered her the part.

Ali was thrilled, immediately accepted the role, then Nick took on the daunting task of trying to merge our busy schedules to come up with an effective rehearsal schedule. Nick was directing me in *Poof!*, acting with me in *Her Heart*, as well as directing his own project, so it was important to build our rehearsal schedule around him. Being that he is such an organized individual, he managed to come up with the schedule that worked for us all! Not all the rehearsals were attended, but we managed to put the shows together.

Appendix A

Journal

Friday, 12th February, 2010

Read Through (4:00pm – 5:00pm)

Tonight was our first read through for both plays. It worked out perfectly to do them together because Nick is involved in both plays. We did not ask Marsha to be present since it was just a read through. Ali was very cute. She is honored to have been asked to be a part of this as she is mostly involved with music and doesn't get to do much of the acting side of things. She has a great interest in it though and hopes this will just be the beginning. I asked Ali if she could do a standard southern accent. Though the script does not specify a location, the language seems to lend itself to that type of accent with words like "chile." She sort of can and we decide to see how it goes. We discuss the play, the characters, and Nick asks us questions, (As every good director should!) Overall it seems like we are off to a good start. This read through gives me great comfort because I am now a hundred percent positive that I chose the right pieces for my Thesis. I LOVE these plays, and I simply cannot wait to embody this interesting, complex, and damaged women.

Tuesday, 16th February, 2010

Poof! (4:30pm – 5:30pm)

Our first official rehearsal for *Poof!* We read through the script again to get a feel for the piece before getting up and trying to get an idea of how some of the movement would be. I am very excited about getting to know Loureen. Considering how short the play is, it is quite

amazing how much of her personality and story is revealed. I am however, concerned about Ali. I know we are still in the early stages, but she seems very amateur. I don't mean to make judgments on her acting, but we have very little time to put these pieces together, and this is after all, my thesis! I have spoken to Nick about my concerns and he has asked me to trust him. He says that as the director, it is his job to bring the best out of her. I hope that he can.

Thursday, 18th February 2010

Her Heart (7:00pm – 8:00pm)

Our first rehearsal for *Her Heart!* Unfortunately, Marsha could not make it. Nick and I however, go ahead and meet. I have very little time to put my pieces together, and I especially want to get more of a feel for *Her Heart* since it is the piece I have not gotten to work yet. We read through once again, and I find myself wondering how I will end up doing some of Glory's more emotional moments. I never want to be over dramatic, but I know that personally, my voice gets higher in pitch when I am excited. I do not however think that necessarily translates to my characters. It may just come across as annoying and unbelievable. I love this play. In all the craziness of everything I am trying to do to finish off this semester, this piece seems to calm me down because of its romantic element. Its hopefulness seems to embody me at its very core. I think that I am a lot like Glory's journey: trepidatious, hopeful, sad, confused, perky, naïve, scared, overwhelmed, and hopeful. I can't wait to learn my lines so we can really explore this piece. There is a bit of physicality that we have to tackle with the bag changing hands as often as it does. I suppose that is where Marsha will come in!

Friday, 19th February 2010

Poof! (4:00pm – 5:00pm)

I had hoped to have learnt all my lines by now, but it has been incredibly difficult with all the things I have to do. I have classes, a dorm to run, a job in the coffee shop, and a thesis to write. I do not want to come across as ungrateful. I feel very blessed to have my two jobs. If I wasn't an RD, I wouldn't be able to afford to go to school, and if I didn't work in the coffee shop, I would not be able to pay my bills. I guess I just need to try harder. Having the script in hand holds me back from truly exploring the character, especially since a large part of who Loureen is, is expressed physically. The rehearsal goes pretty well regardless of the fact that both Ali and I aren't off book yet. Nick blocks the first half of the show and we take note of his instruction. I like the movement he has given me for the first monologue I have. It helps me get comfortable with the air that is there as Loureen awaits Samuel's never coming responses. It is interesting trying to find a balance of what Loureen feels at this point. She is confused by Samuel's disappearance, wants him to stop playing if he is, so she attempts some firmness, at the same time she carries some of the fear and caution that accompanies her everyday life because of the unpredictable man she lives with.

Sunday, 21st February 2010

Her Heart (1:30pm – 3:00pm)

Our first real rehearsal with the great Marsha Parker! I have to admit, I was a little scared. Marsha is very brilliant and, I feared that I wouldn't be at the level she needed me to be at. My fears were realized when right in the middle of our first read through; she asked me a question I did not have an immediate answer to. Even though I had read the script several times, I had not

done my script analysis yet; therefore I had not formulated my character's background and thought process. Though this kind of threw me off kilter, I am glad. Marsha pushes and challenges me. I need this in my education as well as my life. Marsha will be the difference between my skimming the surface of who Glory is, and my truly becoming who she is. We talked about some ideas Marsha has about all the exchanges of the bag. The first pass is imperceptible according to the script, but Marsha wants the choreography of that moment to be completely different than it is written. I have mixed feelings about this as I tend to like following the script, unless I really hate what is written! Either way, I leave the rehearsal feeling like I cannot wait to be off book so that I can get into the character more. Marsha always sees things I had not even thought of in the characters, or in the piece itself. I am excited to explore these elements.

Tuesday, 23rd February 2010

Poof! (4:00pm – 5:00pm)

I have finally managed to learn most of my lines! My only problem is second guessing myself. I tend to do that sometimes, but I am attempting to push through that. Nick has been great about getting the things we need to work with for this piece. We started off with the basic set pieces: a table and two chairs. Then, with every rehearsal he brought in more things. If not the actual set pieces, then something to temporarily stand in its place. I must say, it really helps having Nick around. He doubles as a director as well as a stage manager. I have never been very strong in terms of the technical side of theatre. In my undergrad we only had to take one class to fulfill that part of the curriculum. The class was a crash course of most things involved with tech theatre. We spent a week or two on each aspect; lights, Sound, Props, etc. As much as I loved

the theatre program at my former school, I recognize the fact that, that may not have been sufficient information and training, even if my focus was on performance. Having the spectacles, a phone, and a jacket really help me with my performance. As a nervous, unsure person, I feel that Loureen would probably clutch onto certain things as if her life depended on it. I appreciated being able to start practicing that physicality. I am still concerned about Ali. Even though I feel that I still have a ways to go to get my character where I would like her to be, I feel like Ali is even further behind me. I see Nick giving her notes as we rehearse, but I see very little progress. I hope things will change.

Thursday, 25th February 2010

Poof! (1:00pm – 2:30pm)

Rehearsal was cancelled today, and I am ok with that. I need to solidify my lines and have a lot of other things to do.

Friday, 26th February 2010

Poof! (5:00pm – 6:00pm)

It has been a few days since our last rehearsal, but I think things are going well. In fact, I am more concerned with *Her Heart*. We don't have as many rehearsals for that piece as we do for this one, and I would really like to get a flow going with that piece. I had fun with a particular line today that I couldn't seem to get right because of the alliteration it has. The line is "I don't know whether to have a stiff shot of scotch or a glass of champagne." I however kept saying, "I don't know whether to have a *stiff scott* of scotch or a glass of champagne." It definitely felt like something that would be in the blooper reel if we were filming! It never ceases to amaze me

how many words I don't know. Almost every time I am given a new script, I come across words I do not know the meaning of. I have to admit that I don't always look them up right away, but once I start learning my lines, it becomes very important that I do, as I cannot say a certain word with the right intention if I do not know what it means. In the case of this particular play, the word that confronted me was "canonized." I did not know what it meant until I had it as part of my dialogue and was forced to look it up! According to the dictionary, it means, "to place in the canon of saints; to glorify." Loureen uses this word when she starts ranting about how she should be made a saint because of her ability to turn her abusive husband to dust! When we were working this particular monologue today I got really into the comedy of the lines and apparently made a weird gesture with my body when I was referring to all the women who would be lining up at my feet making pilgrimages to me. Nick liked the movement and told me to keep it. The moment he said that I couldn't remember what I had done! We moved on with the scene, but I hope I can find the movement when I'm running my lines alone tonight.

Sunday, 28th February 2010

Her Heart (1:30pm – 3:00pm)

Her Heart begins with my character, Glory, standing in the front yard, clutching a brown paper bag to her chest, looking at the sky. Marsha has completely changed this and I just love it! Now she has me entering with a flash light to help me find the bench, sitting down, setting up my things, then looking up to the sky. The best part is the fact that she wants me to start singing. Initially I was just humming something, but then the great Marsha Parker was struck by a moment of genius! (as I am sure she is on a daily basis) She suggested I sing "When you wish upon a star." Even though this song is a great American classic, I had only ever seen part of

Pinocchio growing up, and had heard the song before, but didn't really know it well enough. I looked it up on YouTube as soon as I got back to my room and was immediately struck by how perfect this song was for setting up this story. Glory is looking up to the sky full of so many emotions, but above all I believe that she is really hopeful. She hopes that bidding farewell to her husband will give her the closure she needs. The lyrics of this song fit perfectly with this line of thought.

When you wish upon a star

Makes no difference who you are

Anything your heart desires

Will come to you ("When You Wish Upon a Star." *The Disney Wiki*)

The set for this piece is just the bench. I have acquired some of the props, but want to bring everything else on Wednesday since it will be our last rehearsal before we start tech. My character says that her heart broke into nineteen pieces and turned into slate. I want to see if I can find actual slate, break it into nineteen pieces, and put it into the bag.

Tuesday, 2nd March 2010

Poof! (4:00pm – 5:30pm)

Things are going well. There is a moment when Florence asks Loureen if she swears on her right tit, and Loureen clutches her breasts and says "both of them!" I was avoiding doing the motion initially, but now that I'm off book, have my basic blocking, and am really working the scenes, it's important to incorporate the physicality. Being a bit of a prude, I was reluctant to grab my chest and did it very gingerly. Nick suggested that I cross my hands and have opposing hands on opposite breasts. I don't know why, but this seems to work for me! Due to the

positioning, my hands end up just being placed on my chest, rather than grabbing. I am now comfortable with my physicality, so this moment is now believable and I can push past this. I thank God for directors!

Wednesday, 3rd March 2010

Her Heart (6:00pm – 7:00pm)

I have now kissed Nick Moramarco! I don't know why I didn't write about it before. I guess it was because the first time it happened we were just running lines in my room. Now, for those of you that have kissed, or been kissed on stage a million times, I am sure you are rolling your eyes wondering why this is such a big deal for me. Well, unlike ya'll, I do not ever get cast as the ingénue or the love interest, so there have never been any instances for me to be kissed on stage! Now that I think about it, this *still* hasn't happened because technically, I cast myself in this role! Anyway, even though I have always wanted to experience this, I was freaked out by the fact that I would be kissing Nick. During my time at Lindenwood Nick has become my closest friend, therefore I felt like I would be kissing my brother. Needless to say, I didn't have much time to agonize over this because Nick just did it! We were running lines in my room a few days ago and when we got to the moment where East kisses Glory, Nick just kissed me! Amazingly enough I didn't throw up. In fact, I was really happy with the true emotions that came out because I was honestly surprised, as my character would have been. I think this is one part that won't require acting when we perform this play. I have found that every time Nick kisses me in rehearsal, I am bewildered. It happens very naturally, and I am holding onto that!

Thursday, 4th March 2010

Poof! (4:00pm – 6:00pm)

Our last rehearsal before tech! I think I am mostly happy with my character development for Loureen. She still has a way to go but I think that will come with each run we have of *Poof!* We discussed costumes today. Loureen is at home on a typical evening about to have dinner with her husband, so she would be in very casual clothes. I am thinking of wearing a wife beater, light sweater, sweat pants, and house shoes. I don't think Loureen would wear anything form fitting or cute because her self-esteem has taken such a beating over the years. Ali is going to wear casual stuff too. Though the script does not call for it, Nick has incorporated an apron as a costume/prop for Ali's character, Florence. Some of her blocking utilizes the apron, like placing it on the chair or grabbing it and slinging it over her shoulder when she initially tries to leave. Ali has been struggling with some of this movement, at times getting it wrong or forgetting it completely. The worst part is when this happens it pulls her out of the moment completely! I want to be as optimistic as possible, but I have to admit that I am a little concerned. Ali is very sweet, and she tries, but she's still struggling with some lines and I don't really feel like we are connecting through most of the performance. Counting tech and dress we have four performances before our first official performance so I hope that will be enough for us to pull this thing together. I almost feel like I cannot completely go all the way there with Loureen if I am leaving Ali behind. We have to play off of each other and not be mismatched. Here's to hoping!

Sunday, 7th March 2010

Wet Tech (6:30pm Call)

I was so nervous about how today would go. I still feel shaky about both my pieces for different reasons. I am nervous about *Her Heart* because I feel like it needed much more rehearsal time. This piece is so sweet and simple, but I feel like there is more to it than what meets the eye and I wish I had had more rehearsal time with Marsha to get there. Nick and I got together a few times outside of rehearsal and worked some things, so I'm hoping that actually being in the space with the set, costumes, props, lighting and sound will help root me in the world of the piece. I am worried about *Poof!* because of Ali. I hope that she can remember all her lines and also stay in the moment. I think if she can do this then we can connect and make the situation we are portraying as real as possible. I brought my costumes and Nick wants me to get a different sweater. The one I have is black, and he thinks a different color would be better. Marsha had suggested that I wear a white winter outfit! I loved the idea, and spent quite a bit of time shopping around trying to put together what I envisioned Glory to look like. I don't have exactly what I want yet, so I wore a white cardigan so the lighting people could at least have an idea of how my coloring would be. The tech actually went really well! Natalie, who stepped in last minute to be my SM, found "When you wish upon a Star" to play at the end of *Her Heart*. She is so great! Nick built a really cool wall that we can use both in *Poof!* and the piece he is directing. I expected Marsha to have a ton of notes for me after our run, but she didn't. Instead, she congratulated me and said that it was great. There were a few things she reminded me of, but that was pretty much it! I couldn't believe it! I hope that she truly thinks that because I value her opinion very highly. *Poof!* wasn't bad at all. We actually got through it, and I finally feel like the piece will be ok.

Monday, 8th March 2010

Dress Tech (6:30pm Call)

I finally got exactly what I wanted for my costume. After looking everywhere I went to TJ Maxx last night and found the perfect thing. The outfit is not white, it is an ivory color, but it is perfect! It's a plain track suite that I am going to wear with a snow jacket vest thing. (I have never understood the point of these. They don't have arms so what's the point?) I'm completing the look with beige Uggs, soft, furry, ivory gloves and these cute little ivory ears muffs. Once I put this outfit on I felt like I tapped into Glory's world. She has this innocent, romantic, hopeful way about her, and this outfit for some reason embodies that for me. Perhaps it is the overall brightness of the outfit. I want to wear my hair completely pulled back for this piece. The ear muffs will sit better on my head, and I think it's important to clearly see Glory's little hopeful face as she peers at the sky. However, I want the opposite for Loureen. I am going to pull her hair into a ponytail since she is at home cooking, but I want her to have messy bangs. I think the hair in the face will portray how disheveled she feels, and I can also see her hiding behind her hair and attempting to conceal dark circles and any bruises. The rehearsals went well. I did however ask for them to make the *lights* at the end of *Her Heart* much brighter. The audience was seeing them fine before, but I didn't really even notice them. I hope to be able to watch Nick and Roslind's pieces tomorrow. Nick directed Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*, and Roslind is performing a series of monologues by different playwrights including one she wrote herself. I needed today to continue running lines with Ali, and try to solidify our connection before going on.

Tuesday, 9th March 2010

Dress Tech (6:30pm Call)

Today went well. I have everything I need for my pieces, I just need to continue working on getting deeper with my characters. I watched the other graduate student's pieces today and I shall be brutally honest. I love Nick and enjoy his direction but I just don't really care for the play. We studied Pinter's *The Birthday Party* in Marsha's class and I found it intriguing, but did not love it. It is the same with this piece. The twist at the end is cool, but up until that point I was a little bored. I thought the direction and casting was pretty good though. I am not quite sure how I feel about Roslind's piece. I like a couple of the monologues, but had some issues with a couple. In the one where she is talking to her mother in the chair, her eye level needs to be adjusted. Where she is focusing right now doesn't look right, and it takes you out of the moment. I like how different all our work is. It will make for a nice varied evening. Seeing the other pieces has brought me some calm. I have always worried about not being good enough to call myself a graduate student, but I feel that even though my work is not rocket science, it has substance and above all, heart.

Wednesday, 10th March 2010

Final Dress (6:30pm Call)

My final rehearsals before we open! I don't have much to write today because I feel like I have done all I can and now I've just got to go out there and do it! I am so grateful for the people that have helped me to put this thing together. I am a little nervous about singing at the beginning of *Her Heart*, but am so glad Marsha incorporated it into the play. Even though I have a musical theatre degree and have always been a singer, I have not been involved in anything musical

during my time at this school. I am glad for the opportunity to showcase this side of myself to the Lindenwood people before I leave here. (Even if it is just one line).

Thursday, 11th March 2010

Performance (6:30pm Call)

Tonight went very well. The crowd wasn't very big but they were supportive. Before the show I gave out some gifts to the people who helped me put this thing together. I wanted them to know how grateful I was for their participation in something that means so much to me. Marsha gave me some wonderful words of encouragement, and Nick was his usual calm, organized self. I was nervous before going on like I always am, but I wasn't as paralyzed by my stage fright like I used to be. I focused on my character before going on and tried to mentally and emotionally enter their world. Though the pieces went well, I think they can get better.

Friday, 12th March 2010

Performance (6:30pm Call)

Tonight was really great! I think I finally got to where I wanted to go. I connected with Ali most of the time, and I really love how *Her Heart* feels. I have realized that my nerves feed really well into my pieces because both my characters are somewhat nervous, uncertain people. A friend of mine drove all the way from Kansas City to come and watch the show. I went to my undergrad with her so she saw me in my very first play. She told me that she thought that I have grown by leaps and bounds. Lacey is brutally honest, so it was so assuring to hear this. She said she saw a lot of me in *Glory*, and I completely agree with her. I feel like both of these plays represent elements of me. *Poof!* is my before, and *Her Heart* is my after.

Saturday, 13th March 2010

Performance (6:30pm Call, Strike to follow)

“Parting is such sweet sorrow.” I am relieved to be done with this part of my Thesis because I have so many other things to do before I graduate, but I am also incredibly sad to walk away from these plays that allowed me to enter into another world. These pieces helped me grow as a person and as an actress. I learnt a lot of new things and finally got kissed on stage! Tonight’s performances were good, but I think our peak was last night. *Her Heart* was wonderful, but *Poof!* fell a little short for me. Nevertheless, I am very happy with the end result! Strike was quick and painless and I got a lot of compliments from people in the theatre world as well as regular folk.

Appendix B

Cast Lists

Poof

Loureen.....Marylynn Gwatiringa

Florence.....Ali Kersten

Her Heart

Glory.....Marylynn Gwatiringa

East.....Nick Moramarco

Appendix C

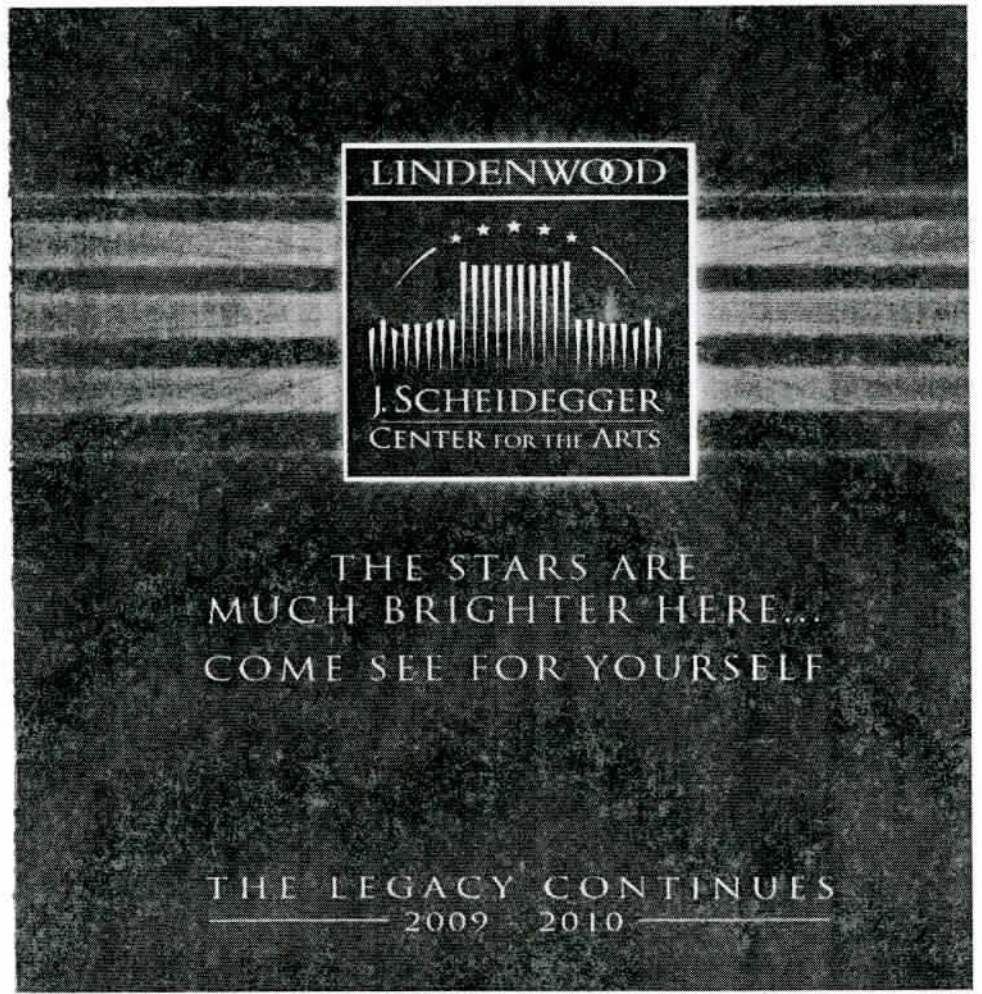
Rehearsal Schedule

Nick Moramarco, Director: 314.402.0493; sfamoramarco@hotmail.com
 Marylynn Gwattaringa, Lourine: 816.419.0533; gwattyem@yahoo.co.uk
 Alexandra Kersten, Florence: 314.306.5192; akersten@gmail.com

"Poof!" & "Her Heart": February-March 2010						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
7	8		10 Auditions 4:00-6:00 pm Jelkyl	11	12 Read Thru 4:00-5:00	13
14	15	16 Poof 4:30-5:30 Heart 5:30-6:30	17	18 Heart 7:00-8:00	19 Poof 4:00-5:00	20
21 Heart 1:30-3:00	22	23 Poof 4:00-5:00	24	25 Poof 1:00-2:30	26 Poof 5:00-6:00	27
28 Heart 1:30-3:00	1	2 Poof 4:00-5:30	3 Heart 6:00-7:00	4 Poof 4:00-6:00	5	6
7 Wet Tech 6:30 Call Jelkyl	8 Dress Tech 6:30 Call Jelkyl	9 Dress Tech 6:30 Call Jelkyl	10 Final Dress 6:30 Call Jelkyl	11 Performance 6:30 Call Jelkyl	12 Performance 6:30 Call Jelkyl	13 Performance 6:30 Call Strike to follow Jelkyl

Appendix D

Production Program



GRADUATE ONE ACTS
CAST

March 11-13

Plays include adult language, references to smoking, adult situations and content.

Silent Screams – Voices of African Women, Selections from the works of Malika Ndlovu (Lueen Cotting), Nathalie Etoke and Rosalind Emuge

Director: Marsha Hollander Parker

Stage Manager: Emily Scott

Tracey, Jennifer, Samanta, Zoe, Brenda, Woman 1 and Woman 2 Rosalind Emuge

Voices Aparna Kalyanaraman, Leah Stewart, Marylynn Gwatiringa

Special Thanks: Special thanks to my mom, dad, Marsha Parker, Emily, the Davis family, and my boy Izaiah for being encouraging and patient.

Poof by Lynn Nottage

Director: Nick Moramarco

Laureen Marylynn Gwatiringa

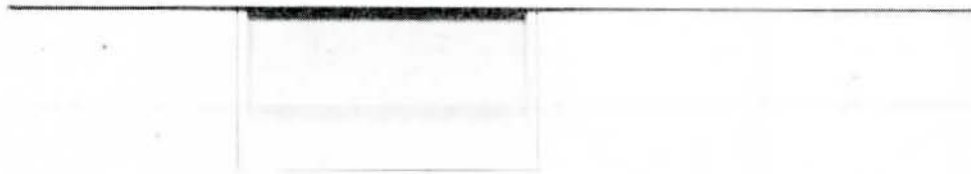
Florence Ali Kersten

Dumb Waiter by Harold Pinter

Director: Nick Moramarco

Gus C. Blaine Adams

Ben Michael Ginsburg



GRADUATE ONE ACTS
CAST
CONTINUED

March 11-13

Her Heart, a selection from *Almost Maine* by John Cariani

Director: Marsha Hollander Parker

Woman Marylynn Gwatiringa

Man Nick Moramarco

Marylynn's Special Thanks:

A very heartfelt thanks to those that selflessly gave their time and love to make my little productions a possibility. Nick, Marsha, Ali and Natalie - I am eternally grateful.

I also want to add that without Nick and Marsha I would not have gotten through my MFA. (You two have been my angels!)

To my family: Mom, Dad, Michelle and Patrick, my heart beats for you, therefore everything I do is for you.

To my friends and all those who support me - THANK YOU! I truly appreciate your kind and generous spirits.

Lastly, I would like to say that I give all the glory to God. It is because of him that I have my talents, and it is through him that all things in my life are possible.



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