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Rain Pain: An Analysis of Ferris Layman from The Diviners

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Rain Pain

An Analysis of Ferris Layman from The Diviners

A Master's Thesis

By Rodney Whatley



MFA Theatre: Acting

Spring 1992

Thesis
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The Department of Performing Arts
of
Lindenwood College

Upon the recommendation of the Department of Performing Arts,
this thesis is hereby accepted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

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Table of Contents

Introduction..... 1

Chapter One: Building A Soul..... 11

Chapter Two: The World of the Uncharacter..... 13

Chapter Three: The Visualization of a Character..... 24

Chapter Four: A Rehearsal/Performance Journal..... 31

Chapter Five: Post Mortem: An End View..... 53

Appendix A: COMMITTEE IN CHARGE OF CANDIDACY..... 58

Appendix B: Ferris Layman Costume Rendering..... 63

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Table of Contents

Introduction..... i
Chapter One: Building A Soul..... 1
Chapter Two: The World of the Character..... 12
Chapter Three: The Visualization of a Character..... 24
Chapter Four: A Rehearsal/Performance Journal..... 31
Chapter Five: Post Mortem: An End View..... 53
Appendix A: Niki Juncker Interview..... 58
Appendix B: Ferris Layman Costume Rendering..... 63

LINDENWOOD COLLEGE
MASTER OF FINE ARTS DEGREE
THESIS PROSPECTUS

By Rodney Whatley

In fulfillment of the requirements of Lindenwood College for Master of Fine Arts degree candidates, I am undertaking the following thesis project, which consists of two main components:

- A) I will perform the substantial role of Ferris Layman in the play The Diviners, by Jim Leonard, Jr., on Jelkyl Theatre, Lindenwood's Mainstage, on Oct. 3-5 and Oct. 10-12, 1991.
- B) I will submit a written thesis to the committee for its approval.

The written thesis will consist of five chapters:

I) Analysis

Here I will offer a detailed character analysis using ideas from Francis Hodge and Constantin Stanislavski.

II) Researching the Role

This chapter will contain my research of personal details relating to character such as auto repair, parenting of dysfunctional children, human psychology, and other aspects that relate to the world of the play.

III) Physical Characterization

This chapter will concern itself with my physical transformation from actor to character, including details about make-up and costumes.

IV) Production

In this chapter I will present a rehearsal/performance journal including my thoughts and the thoughts of others during the rehearsal and performance process.

V) Post Mortem

In this final chapter, I will discuss the overall effectiveness of my performance based on the solicited opinions of faculty and community.

This project should be evaluated on three grounds. First, did the actor's research and analysis develop a believable characterization? Second, did the actor's performance coincide with the director's concept, and did it meld seamlessly with the rest of the production? And finally, did the performance communicate to the audience the story and idea of the play?

Chapter One
Building A Soul

In order to make a character a living human soul for the audience, one must fully understand that character. Complete comprehension in acting requires dissection because every aspect of the character must be examined minutely. The actor must fuse both intellectually and emotionally with the character.

In Jim Leonard, Jr.'s mix of comedy and drama, The Diviners, the actor chose to utilize the philosophies of Francis Hodge and Constantin Stanislavski in his approach to Ferris Layman. The first system, more analytical in nature and incorporating logic and reason, is derived from Francis Hodge's book, Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style. The second system, more emotional and less tangible, originated with Constantin Stanislavski's work in Creating A Role. By using these two different methods, the actor composed a completely detailed portrait of Ferris Layman.

Francis Hodge states that, "A character is determined only after his actions and not before" (Hodge 45). The first order of business, then, is a careful study of the script and the character's actions. While studying the script, an actor must pay careful attention to five elements: desire, will, moral stance, decorum, and nervousity.

The first element is the character's desire. What does the character want? All of a character's actions are motivated by a specific purpose. Constantin Stanislavski referred to desire as the super-objective in his work Creating a Role. "In a play,

the whole stream of individual, minor objectives, all the imaginative thoughts, feelings, and actions of an actor, should converge to carry out the super-objective of the plot" (271). What is true of the play is also true of the characters in the play. With his own super-objective, which ties in with the super-objective of the play, the character will have a string of actions which will lead him to his goal. The character's string of actions is called a "through-going action" and is the inner line of effort that takes an actor from start to finish of a play (Stanislawski 273-274).

Ferris Layman's desire is to save his son's life, since his son is one of the last remaining members of his family. His son, Buddy, has a case of hydrophobia that is monumentally psychotic, brought on by a near-drowning incident that occurred when the boy was four years old. Buddy's mother died while saving his life. When threatened by contact with any form of water, such as rain or bath water, Buddy begins screaming and crying hysterically. Buddy's filth is a serious threat to his physical and mental health, making his need for treatment a desperate one.

The second element is the character's will, or his strength in attaining his desire. The essence of drama is conflict, and the character must have some obstacle to overcome in order to attain his desire. Ferris's conflict lies within himself. In order to bathe Buddy, Ferris must bear Buddy's screams and cries, which jolt Ferris back to the most painful event he ever experienced, watching his beloved wife Sarah drown. Ferris cannot bear to relive the psychic trauma of witnessing Sarah's untimely death. In an attempt to avoid pain, Ferris has

thrown himself into his work for over ten years and has let his family and social life decay. He is not strong enough to overcome his fears; therefore, his will is weak. Ferris enlists the aid of the wandering ex-preacher, C.C. Showers, to help save Buddy.

The third element of the character is his moral stance. Is he honest? Does he play by the rules? Ferris has a deep respect for honesty. Although he complains, Ferris abides by the laws of Prohibition. He is honest in his business dealings. He is against theft. He pays all of his creditors. He helps out a poor, down-trodden ex-preacher. There is only one instance in the play where Ferris behaves dishonestly. Ferris conceals the truth about treatment for Buddy from Showers. Basil had told Ferris how to combat ringworm, and Ferris kept it secret because he had no wish to submerge Buddy in water. Ferris did not actually lie, but he did bury the truth, thus betraying his responsibility to his son. Ferris Layman is an honest man, albeit frightened and weak when it comes to his son's condition.

The next element is the character's decorum, or his physical appearance. Why does he look the way he does and what does this say about him? He is described in the script as a greasy mechanic, a man who works with his hands. In order to escape the loneliness of life without his wife, Ferris threw himself into his business with passionate abandon. He cares little about his physical appearance because he has no one for whom he feels he must look presentable. He bathes three times a week, as he is constantly covered with grease and oil. He wears his work clothes almost exclusively, and his hair and beard are unkempt.

Ferris is not concerned with his physical appearance because

the only people he cares deeply about are his son and daughter. He does not feel that he has to be well-groomed for his family. He is a hard worker who has let his work consume him so that it may fill the void left by his deceased wife Sarah.

The final element of the character, according to Hodge, is his nervousity. Nervosity plays an important part in the actor's physical presence onstage. Nervosity is the actual physical state the actor's body is in during the scene (Hodge 46). Is he tired, sore, sick, tense, or what? In determining Ferris's nervousity for each scene, one must consider how Ferris spends his days.

Ferris Layman is a strong believer in hard work. He rises early each morning, usually at sunrise, and works until sunset. He eats dinner with his family, stays up for two or three hours, and then retires for the evening. If he gets a full night's sleep, his mood will be good. The actor chose to make Ferris a slow riser unable to reach peak awareness until after breakfast, coffee, and a couple of hours of hard work. If anything disturbed his sleep the night before, Ferris would be in a dark mood.

The first scene containing Ferris is on page twenty of Act I. The time is mid-morning. After a good night's sleep, Ferris is well-rested and alert. In this scene, he is in one of his better moods of the play, which explains why he is playful with both his son and Mr. Showers.

The second Ferris scene, on page twenty-nine, takes place in the early morning. Ferris has not had time to awaken fully. He is hungry, craves coffee, and is in a sour mood. He contradicts almost everything Goldie says to him.

In the third scene, which leads immediately into the fourth,

the day has come to an end and Ferris is a tired man. He gets Buddy to calm down so that Ferris himself may sleep. His stomach, full from a recent dinner, pulls Ferris to bed. When Buddy awakens the household with loud complaints about his worsening itch, Ferris stumbles out of his bedroom in a foul mood. He is tired, his sleep has been disturbed, he has gas from dinner, and he has a slight case of indigestion. Some of Ferris's defense barriers are down in this scene because he was dreaming of his wife before Buddy woke him. Ferris is compelled to talk of Sarah to Showers.

In the fifth scene, on page forty-nine, it has been a good first hour of the day for Ferris. He is well-rested and cheerful. He cherishes the opportunity for a conversation with his friend Basil Bennett.

The end of the work day is the time for Act II, page seventy-one. Ferris is tired and hungry; his hands and feet ache, and his back hurts from leaning over engines all day. He is short-tempered and in no mood to deal with one of Buddy's outbursts. Ferris desires to clean himself, eat dinner, and relax until bedtime.

In the next scene containing Ferris, on page eighty-three, it is the dawning of a new day. The sun is just raising its fiery head above the treetops. Ferris did not sleep well the night before. Haunted by nightmares, Ferris tossed and turned and slept fitfully in awkward positions. His back hurts and his neck is stiff.

The scene leads to what is the climactic moment for Ferris, the final scene in which he appears. He overcomes his fears and agrees to help Showers bathe Buddy. However, upon attempting to force Buddy into a tub of water, Ferris loses his resolve at the sound of Buddy's cries. If Ferris had a better physical condition

at that moment, if he had slept better the night before, his mental condition might have been better as well, thus allowing him to persevere despite Buddy's loud protestations.

A character's desire, will, moral stance, decorum, and nervousness are all things that an actor must consider in his analysis (Hodge 45). A character analysis, however, is incomplete if these five elements constitute the extent of the actor's research. Another facet of the character can be determined by his environment and the events that have formed his life. A character's environment and life history are called the "given circumstances."

The term "given circumstances" defines the material in a script that delineates the world of the play, including environmental facts, previous action, and polar attitudes (Hodge 23-24). Environmental facts will be discussed in the next chapter.

Previous action is all of the significant events that took place in the lives of the characters before the play begins. Previous action gives present action a base on which to move forward (Hodge 25).

The point of attack for The Diviners is a late one. The play begins almost at the end of Buddy Layman's life; consequently, there is a great deal of previous action.

At the age of twenty, Ferris fell in love with Sarah and clumsily proposed marriage. She accepted, and one year after the wedding, Sarah gave birth to their son. The daughter was born the next year. They were a happy, church-going family for the next three years. When their son Buddy was four years old, the family went on an outing to the river. While playing, Buddy was swept away by the swift river waters. Sarah sacrificed herself to save

Buddy from drowning. Ferris watched the incident helplessly, for he was unable to swim.

Buddy was under water for several minutes, long enough for oxygen deprivation to damage his brain. Ferris, crushed by the loss of his wife, throws himself into his work. The passion he felt for Sarah is channeled into his garage.

Buddy developed a mental aberration, a fear of water that is monumental in its intensity. Water took his mother away, his mother died in the water; therefore, Buddy believes his mother is still in the water. If the water touches Buddy he will be unable to breathe because he is responsible for his mother's death. Buddy's fear becomes so strong that Ferris can no longer bathe his son. Ferris attempted to bathe Buddy by force, but Buddy's screams, similar to those he emitted that day at the river, bring back the haunting loss Ferris suffered that day. To avoid pain, Ferris ceased all efforts to clean Buddy.

When Buddy was seven years old, the church burned down. The town of Zion was bereft of organized religion. Ferris had lost interest in church by that time, but he did notice that without the distraction of church activities, his neighbors paid more attention to how Ferris looked after his family. The neighbors became critical of Ferris's lack of fatherly discipline concerning Buddy's grooming habits.

Jennie Mae eased Ferris's burden as she grew older and assumed more responsibilities. With her running his house, Ferris could bury himself in even more work. During this period, Ferris avoided confronting Buddy's problems. Ferris's problems, such as his inability to cope with his wife's death, were occupying much of

his mind. Ferris settled into a routine of work; he denied, both to himself and others, that Buddy had a problem. He hoped Buddy would get better by himself.

Whenever Ferris hired someone to help in the garage he would work that person so hard he would invariably quit and seek employment with an easier taskmaster. It is at this point that the present action of the play begins. Ferris had just lost another employee when his daughter came to tell him that a stranger was in the yard asking about work. Despite the stranger's complete ignorance about automobiles, Ferris hires him. Ferris has two reasons for hiring C.C. Showers. The first is that Ferris needs someone to help with Buddy. Showers and Buddy develop an instant friendship. Ferris does not have any religious interests, but he knows the people of Zion do. Showers's distracting presence would allow Ferris to avoid his neighbor's criticism of Buddy's dirty physical condition.

Polar attitudes are "The emotional environment of a character" (Hodge 26). Polar attitudes are the character's beliefs and attitudes at the beginning of a play and at the end. If a character is a major character, his polar attitude will change during the course of the play. If he experiences no change, then he is a supporting character meant to influence one of the major characters. This actor felt that Ferris underwent change during the events detailed in The Diviners, thus making him a major character in the play.

When the play begins Ferris believes that a problem ignored will eventually go away. He operates under the delusion that if

a memory causes great pain, it should be blocked and barricaded behind countless walls of denial. Ferris's deteriorating homelife and friendship with Showers, Buddy's failing health, and Jennie Mae's growing maturity, show Ferris that he has been mistaken. Ferris realizes that no matter how painful, memories and situations must be confronted and resolved. In attempting to bathe Buddy, Ferris is dealing with a difficult situation. He opens himself up for trauma because he will be forced to relive Sarah's death when Buddy begins crying. Ferris's polar attitude at the end of the play is the realization that he is too weak to triumph over problems that have grown too powerful, and he must leave the younger and stronger Showers to finish the job.

Constantin Stanislavski theorized that in order for an actor to become one with the play, he must bond spiritually with it. Stanislavski went on to explain that an actor must search his own soul in a pain-staking self-analysis and find that part of him that is analagous to the play (Creating A Role 8-9).

The actor must search his own life experience and find a common bond between himself and the character he is to play. In the case of Ferris Layman and Rodney Whatley, the actor was able to find two such links. Ferris believes that the best way to face a problem is to ignore it until it disappears. Part of his philosophy stems from his statement to Basil on page fifty-two of Act I: "I'm saying you gotta want things better or they only get worse, huh?" Confrontations make Ferris extremely uneasy. In Act II, he says, "The boy gets near water and he's screamin and cryin - it just sets off my mind, don't you see?" (Leonard 87)

This actor shares the character's feelings about confrontations. In the past, I have held positions in management and been forced to terminate other's employment. I dreaded the confrontations, and afterwards I would be a shaking, sweating, nervous wreck. I elected to retire from management for that reason. Like Ferris, I also stay away from situations that worry me or make me nervous. These traits make it easier for me to understand Ferris's deep fears and comprehend why he allowed Buddy's problem to go on as long as he did. On several occasions, audience members approached me after a performance to ask a confused question. "Why didn't Ferris just tie the boy up and wash him?" The actor understood why, and if the audience members had placed themselves into Ferris's position, they would have understood as well. Neither Ferris nor Rodney emerge from their homes every day willing to experience great pain.

One of Ferris's personality traits is his pain and obsession with the loss of his beloved wife. The separation of husband and wife was forced and sudden. The remorse Ferris felt was a cornerstone in analyzing him.

At the age of twenty-one, I married Lisa Robin Martin, age twenty. Two years later, we were divorced. I tried to reconcile with my wife and save our marriage, but she had moved on and was not interested in matrimonial salvage. Separation from my spouse was also forced, and while not as sudden or as painful, I was able to tap into Ferris's feelings of frustration, despair, humiliation, and grief that his experiences must have left with him. Ferris's longing for Sarah became palpable and real for me. Possessing the ability to understand a character's pain provided the final ingredient

for analysis that I needed.

An examination of the character's super-objective, an analysis of his personality based on his actions, a study of his environment, the previous events of his life, and his beliefs, will aid an actor in completely comprehending the person he is to represent onstage; however, that person does not become a living human soul until the actor has found a common bond between himself and the character. Once all of the work has been done by the actor, he will be ready for an audience.

Chapter Two

The World of the Character

An actor needs to have complete comprehension of any character in order to achieve a proper actor/character understanding. The actor must consider not only the internal world of his character but the external world of the character as well. A thorough analysis of a character's environment will enable an actor to assess what elements affect his decision-making process, and why he reacts to any given situation in the manner that he does.

Given circumstances provide the best way of looking at the character's world. There are six major factors to consider: geographic location; the date, year, season, and time of day; economic environment; political environment; social environment; religious environment (Hodge 25). These major factors that constitute Ferris Layman's environment will provide the key to understanding his world.

According to the play, the geographic location of The Diviners is "...in the homes, fields, and public gathering places of the mythical southern Indiana town of Zion, population forty" (Leonard 6). It is a small town with a few houses and farms, situated close to a river.

The state motto of Indiana is "The Crossroads of America." It is bordered by Lake Michigan, Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, and Illinois. The southern border is the Ohio River, which gives the state access to the Mississippi River system (Encyclopedia Americana 51).

The author placed Zion in southern Indiana; therefore, it is logical to assume that the river in the play is the Ohio River. Trade routes along the Ohio River would be well-traveled, and it is possible that goods were imported and exported to and from Zion by this waterway. The river would be not only a source of life for the town but also a vital connection to the outside world.

Indiana has warm summers, cool winters, and an annual precipitation rate of thirty-five to forty-four inches (Encyclopedia Americana 52). The climate is conducive to agriculture, making Zion mainly agrarian in nature. The population should be well-fed and prosperous.

The town Zion is, as author Jim Leonard, Jr. asserts, mythical. Research on the town itself is impossible; however, the definition of the word "zion" has implications that reflect on the nature of the town and its citizens.

In Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, the word "zion" has many religious denotations:

zion, [Hebrew, originally the name of the Jebusite stronghold on the southern part of the eastern hill of Jerusalem] 1. The hill in Jerusalem which, after the capture of that city by the Israelites, became the royal residence of David and His successors, the place of the temple, the center of Hebrew government, worship, and life. 2. Hence: a. The chosen people; The Israelites. b. The theocracy, or church directly administered by God, or c. The heavenly city of God (2982).

Naming the town "Zion" implies several layers of meaning. The town is at the top of a hill overlooking the river and surrounding forests. The town is the residence of at least one special citizen, like David. In this case, the special citizen touched by God and possessed of supernatural gifts is Buddy Layman. The town is the center of life for the nearby communities. All of the families gather in Zion to discuss politics, religion, and the daily events of their lives. The citizens of Zion are of exceptional moral fiber and are made strong by their beliefs in solid values. The church in Zion burned down ten years before the play began; therefore, God has to take a more direct route when dealing with his children who live in Zion. "Heavenly city of God," as Webster described it, implies that the citizens are more in tune with the nature and God's creations than most people who live in other communities.

Ferris claims that he is not very good at praying, but with God on the minds and lips of almost every character in the play, it is hard to imagine much distance actually exists between God and Ferris. Ferris lost some of his enthusiasm for religion when Sarah died, but living in Zion keeps him in touch with the Lord. The resultant effect of living in Zion is that Ferris is a person who is able to adapt to changes in life as well as changes in weather.

The play begins in May, sometime in the 1930's. The exact year is never specified, although references to the Hoover administration, Prohibition, and the Great Depression lead one to conclude the year is prior to 1933. The play finishes at the close of summer. The time of day varies in every scene, but most of Ferris'

scenes take place in the early morning. As Ferris is a slow riser, he is not always the most energetic character onstage.

Ferris is fond of the summer season, enjoys the heat and moisture and the productivity that summer brings. He was never much of a drinker before Prohibition, so his lifestyle has not greatly altered. The Great Depression has changed his life in one aspect. Most of his customers now use the barter system for Ferris' service rather than cash payment. Ferris prefers cash but if the customer has no money he will accept payment of goods. Basil, for example, always pays Ferris in corn or whatever crop he has grown that year. Zion suffers from the depressed economic situation, but because of his skills as a mechanic, Ferris manages to support his family in a more comfortable style than most of his neighbors.

After 1920, federal highways were expanded at a constant rate in Indiana. Several interstates were added for use by trucking companies hauling goods. Railroads lost almost all of their passengers to cars, buses, and airplanes. No large cities developed, allowing Indiana to retain its rural flavor (Encyclopedia Americana 63). The constant expansion of the automobile industry and the Indiana highway system put Ferris' skills as a mechanic in great demand. The need for a talented mechanic would increase with each year's passing. With the lack of urban development, Zion would remain fairly isolated. The nearest town of equal or greater size would be several miles away. There is no mention of a mechanic in the area providing competition for Ferris, thus Ferris was financially secure enough to hire an inexperienced assistant, C.C. Showers. Ferris is constantly in his garage,

working at a pace that exhausts his younger assistant. The growing auto industry and Ferris's productivity add weight to the theory that he is extremely comfortable financially.

Although Ferris does complain about President Hoover by occasionally making disparaging remarks about the mental capacities of the Chief Executive, politics seem to be a distant concern for Zion's citizens. World War I is a fading memory, but the patriotic zeal brought on by the unifying factor of war still flavors daily American life. World War II is a remote possibility, a speck on the horizon not worthy of concern. The following quote from an Indiana historian may make Zion's detached political concerns seem out of character:

It is said that the first words of a Hoosier baby are: I'm not a candidate for office, but if nominated I will run, and if elected I will serve. The false modesty fools no one. Most Hoosiers enjoy their politics. They participate more intensively than citizens of many other states (Peckman 130).

Zion's more relaxed political attitude can be attributed to the community's small size. They have no mayor, no sheriff, no police officers; in short, they have no local elected officials. Most people so removed from the political arena would lose interest completely, but Ferris and the rest of Zion have managed to retain their enthusiasm for national politics.

The 1930's was a time of tension. Ferris states that the President is largely ignorant and is a poor leader. "Here we sit with half the damn country wound up as tight as a shock spring and

Hoover won't let a man drink" (Leonard 21). The tension of the times caused great worry for the average man.

It is logical that Ferris should choose to be a Democrat. After the evil of the dark Ku Klux Klan years in the late 1920's, new and powerful leaders arose in the Democratic Party, stirring the citizens of Indiana (Peckman 145). Ferris's emergence into the years of the 1930's was marked with political enthusiasm. The record of the Hoover administration served to dampen Ferris's inner fire. At the time of the play, Ferris is marshalling his strength for the next presidential election.

The most important external factor in a person's life is his social environment. A person is judged by what he does, not what he says, and the true nature of a character can often be found by close scrutiny of his relationships with family and friends.

The paramount relationship in The Diviners that defines Ferris is his relationship with his two children, Buddy and Jennie Mae. Ferris has an advantage in his role as a parent because he lives in a rural community rather than an urban community. In a rural environment, the father lives near his work. He is home for lunch, and since work is nearby, he does not expend much time in travelling to and from his place of business. He is always around to communicate his philosophies, interact with friends and customers, and set an example as a real leader. The rural father is always there to exert a positive, stern influence (Noland 272-273).

The father is as much responsible as any mother would be for answering questions about sex (Noland 279). This is truer of Ferris because he is a widower. Ferris has shirked his responsibilities

because sex unnerves him. He has not had to answer questions about sex from Buddy, but Jennie Mae is in transition from girl to woman. She has many questions, but Ferris prefers to let her find out from someone else or remain completely ignorant about sex like her brother.

Fathers make it easier for daughters to feel comfortable around men.

Father will need to have a good relationship with his daughter during puberty and adolescence to be able to relinquish her to her male contemporaries--a psychological role, incidentally, which fathers have not handled too well in the past (Noland 280).

Ferris has more difficulty with the idea of releasing his daughter to another man than most fathers would. He has come to depend on Jennie Mae for the smooth operation of his household. Jennie Mae cooks, cleans, and keeps a close eye on her brother. Jennie Mae's presence allows Ferris the freedom to work in the garage without constant worry and interruption from Buddy. If Ferris's daughter leaves his home, Ferris's lifestyle would be greatly altered. Ferris is comfortable with the routine of his life and wants no disruptions.

Ferris's relationship with Buddy is of the most importance in The Diviners. While the exact nature of Buddy's disability is never revealed in the script, it obviously stems from the near-drowning incident that occurred when Buddy was four years old. The oxygen deprivation that damaged Buddy's brain and the drowning of his mother ruined any chance that Ferris and Buddy could have for a normal father and son relationship.

It is easier to recognize psychological problems in adults than in children because adults have more restrictions placed on their behavior. Some researchers have gone so far as to say,

Within the framework of most civilized societies, children are much more easily forgiven their trespasses and peculiarities than are adults. The unacceptable behavior of disturbed children is often tolerated because children are expected to grow out of these unacceptable patterns (Berkowitz and Rothman 1-2).

This theory explains why Ferris has tolerated Bud's abnormal behavior for such an extended period of time. Ferris says that caring for children is comparable to growing weeds. "You can pull em or trim em or hedge em on back some, but you're best off to just leave em go. You ever seen a weed that ain't healty?" (Leonard 22) Ferris has obviously turned these gardening tips into a philosophy that allows his son and him to coexist peacefully.

Observation is the first step in aiding disturbed children (Berkowitz and Rothman 3). Ferris has delegated the responsibility of watching Buddy to Jennie Mae, thus keeping Ferris at a disadvantage as far as therapy for his son is concerned.

Teachers have an objectivity that no parent can ever hope for when studying children. This distance is important for the treatment of dysfunctional children (Berkowitz and Rothman 2). C.C. Showers is quick to notice serious problems in Buddy's behavior. Showers's former role as a preacher is not far from that of a teacher. Showers was responsible for teaching the gospel; his textbook was the Bible. His career as a preacher prepared C.C.'s

objective observational skills and made it easy to perceive problems with Buddy that Ferris was unable, or unwilling, to notice.

Some investigators believe that schizophrenia is hereditary, determined before birth, and activated by a crisis of some sort (Berkowitz and Rothman 12). The damaging effect of oxygen deprivation triggered the mental problems Buddy had inherited from his father.

Ferris and Buddy both show signs of extensive uses of defense mechanisms. In Buddy's case, his defense mechanism is to retreat from reality and refuse to develop and mature as a normal person would. "A defense mechanism is a protective device which permits one to conceal an unacceptable truth from oneself" (Berkowitz and Rothman 39). A defense mechanism is usually unconscious, and is a learned response to experiences or situations.

Ferris's defense mechanism is denial. By refusing to face a situation, a person convinces himself that the problem is non-existent. "If they don't face a situation, they cannot believe it will happen" (Berkowitz and Rothman 48). Ferris has blinded himself to the consequences of his son's illness because that illness threatens the routine of his existence. Subconsciously, Ferris knows that what he is doing is wrong; however, he is helpless to stop himself. He hires Showers as a first step towards repairing both his son's damaged mind and Ferris's own mental problems.

It is normal for a child to feel hate for his parents, thus adding another layer to the relationship between Ferris and Buddy. The child must simultaneously deny the hate's existence because he also loves his parents. These contradictory feelings bring

on feelings of intense guilt (Berkowitz and Rothman 38). In the case of Buddy and Ferris, these hate-love-guilt feelings are mutual. Buddy hates his father because Ferris is the protector of the family, and yet he allowed Sarah Layman to die. Buddy also feels guilt because Sarah died in saving his life, and he feels guilt for secretly hating his father. Buddy loves his father because Ferris loves him and has shown the boy great love, affection, and tenderness. Ferris feels hate for Buddy because Sarah died saving Buddy's life, yet, at the same time, Ferris hates himself for harboring any malice towards his son, whom he loves deeply.

The relationship between Ferris and Buddy is the most complicated and interesting relationship in Ferris' social environment. The relationship between Ferris and Jennie Mae is less complicated, yet it is still not effortless. Ferris works hard on his links to his children, lending a certain admirability to the mechanic. It would be much easier to completely ignore his children and concentrate on his job, but Ferris makes the attempt to hold his fractured family together.

The final aspect of Ferris's environmental influences is the religious position of the community. Early settlers of Indiana believed that the real virtues were good works, industry, perseverance, and faith in the future (Beckman 80). Ferris and the citizens of Zion subscribe to the belief that hard work is worthy of high regard. Laziness and sloth are the worst traits a person in Zion could manifest. Optimism about the future, even during the Great Depression, reveals itself on page fifty-two when Ferris

says to Basil, "Listen, Basil, things're bound to come around, huh? I'm saying you gotta want things better or they only get worse, hun?"

The exact religious affiliation of Zion is never stated, other than it is Christian in nature. Indiana had Catholics, Shakers, and Harmonists until around 1930 when the Shakers and Harmonists migrated. There was also an influx of Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Quakers, Lutherans, Mennonites, Amish, Jews, and other protestant branches (Peckman 88-89).

Zion has been without a church for ten years at the beginning of the play. With people who take religion as seriously as Zion's population does, that might seem baffling at first, but it is actually quite factual.

Concomitant with the growth of cities and the development of the automobile in the early Twentieth Century came a broad decline in the number of rural protestant churches. Barely able to support even a part-time pastor in times of limited travel, they were abandoned by a declining rural population in an age of growing mobility (Peckman 90).

The lack of organized religious activities does not indicate a lack of faith in Zion's citizenry. Indeed, the fact that religion still pervades their daily lives and influences almost all conversations indicates that the Zionites have a stronger faith than most communities that have a church.

Ferris lives in an environment where God's presence is felt at every moment. It is not a restrictive presence, as the religious practice is unorganized and up to the individual; however, the consequences of a person's actions, whether good or evil, are

Chapter Three

The Visualization of a Character

The transformation from actor to character is not complete after the actor has finished analyzing his inner world and external influences. To complete a character's portrait, the actor must also adopt a physical appearance that is analogous to the character being portrayed. Appropriate costumes and make-up aid the actor in completing the stage illusion.

The audience must see the character as well as hear him.

This human soul must be visible in all its aspects, mental and physical. Besides, it must be unique.

It must be the soul ... We are all human, we have the same number of arms and legs and our noses are placed respectively in the same positions. Yet, as there are no two oak leaves alike, there are no two human beings alike (Boleslavsky 85).

Not only must the actor create an image that will help the audience identify with the character, he must do it in a way that is completely original. The best way is to try and take the actor's own qualities and those of the character's, combine them, and use what is created in the union.

In a personal interview on February 3, 1992, Niki Juncker, Costume Designer for The Diviners, explained why she thinks costumes are so important to acting.

Well, I don't think a costume is the most important thing, the actor is the most important thing, but I think it can help the audience. Some actors react differently to costumes. I mean, the sense that it makes them feel more like the character. The audience, it helps them with visual identification.

Ferris Layman had two costumes, his first a blue denim coverall, brown boots, a brown bandana, and a white sleeveless undershirt. His second costume was a pair of dark dress slacks and a light dress shirt.

Ferris spends most of the play in his workclothes, the coveralls, only changing into the casual street clothes once in Act I. The scene in the street clothes takes place on the front porch of the Layman home. The time is late in the evening. Ferris has been home for several hours and has had a chance to relax. Niki Juncker explains her use of the two costumes:

The first major costume, the coverall, simply, the choices there, I wanted something that wasn't real bright, because that kind of denim was very common for mechanics in that time period. It was suitable for him. The second costume was derived from two things, the fact that he had to come out in that night scene, the coverall wasn't very practical for that scene. Plus, you had to have a feeling that he didn't always wear that coverall.

Costumes affect actors in different ways. Some actors don't feel they can completely become the character until they don the character's clothes. I do not ascribe to this belief. By the

time I have reached a dress rehearsal, I feel comfortable with the character. I use costumes to bring the external qualities of the character to a polished finish.

With Ferris Layman, the denim coverall gave me a better idea of Ferris's physical state in a given work day. The costume was comfortable, non-restrictive, and a little warm. The warmth of the material caused me to leave the front of the costume unfastened, allowing air circulation and sweat evaporation.

The boots had more of an effect on my performance than any other costume piece. Young actors today, myself included, tend to wear soft-soled athletic shoes in their daily lives. Ferris's boots slowed down my walking pace and altered my posture. The deacceleration of movement made me realize Ferris was more relaxed when on the job than I had previously believed. Instead of hurrying through a repair, Ferris keeps a steady pace all day long. My posture relaxed as well, bringing more sense of ease. A lower state of tension gave me an incisive viewpoint on how Ferris feels during the day, and gave me a base for tension variety. With a lower tension base, Ferris's tension changes became more readily apparent and visually recognizable. I had a wider tension range with which to work.

The second costume, in the night scene, was disheveled because Ferris had been asleep prior to entering. I kept the costume in a heap when not wearing it so that it looked properly wrinkled. The haphazard costume helped me to illustrate that this was a Ferris rarely seen by anyone. He was relaxed and willing to talk about Sarah, his deceased wife. The discussion with Showers in this scene is the only time Ferris talks at length about his life before

Sarah died. The costume reflected Ferris's thoughts and feelings about his lost joy and present pain.

I felt comfortable in the costumes before performances began. I found pockets in the coveralls and filled each pocket with a different tool. I made a minimum of noise when walking across the wooden stage, a difficult task when wearing heavy boots. Niki Juncker was asked if she thought Rodney Whatley successfully created the illusion of the middle-aged Ferris Layman through costume and make-up. She replied, "Yes, I think so."

Ferris Layman was ten years older than the actor portraying him. In order for the audience to believe that he was the father of two teen-age children, Whatley would have to undergo an aging process. It is important for young actors to understand the science of age make-up. According to Mrs. Juncker,

...they need to learn the different ways to change their faces. Learning how to handle age make-up is a good way of learning how to handle make-up in general. It is also important in that it is a visual aid in whatever an actor is doing with an older character. I think that is important for a young actor

Going into make-up, my goals were to make Ferris appear in his late thirties, give him an air of exhaustion and of an unkempt appearance. Ferris is described in the script only as a greasy mechanic. Jesse Bean, director, wanted to go further with the concept of Ferris's appearance, and requested that I grow a beard.

Niki Juncker said that the beard made Ferris look "...dirtier and messier. My own personal feeling is that, for that time period, the beard really would have set him apart as somewhat of an oddball."

The beard and the dirt gave me an abundance of material with which to work. Like my son, Buddy, I was unconcerned about my appearance and the opinions of others. While not a social rebel, I was apart from normal society in Zion, Indiana. I was more concerned with my work and my family than I was in making others like me as a person.

A carefree attitude about other's opinions gave Ferris a freedom of expression with his own opinions. It made Ferris fearlessly honest and unassuming. Honesty became an important part of Ferris's character, and I incorporated that honesty into all of the scenes. In the play, Ferris chooses to deceive Showers by not revealing a cure Basil had given Ferris for Buddy's itching. The fact that he is honest about everything else shows how uncomfortable he is with Buddy's condition and how desperate he is to hide from it. It is ironic that he is honest with everyone else and lies to himself about his son's condition.

I did not use a base on my face because my facial hair covered most of my face. I used age lines incorporating shadows and highlights around my eyes and forehead. Using brown, I darkened my beard and blended until the beard was of uniform consistency. Once consistency was accomplished, I used clown white to age spots of the beard and the hair at my temples. I applied a light frosting of white to my eyebrows. The last touch of make-up came after I powdered: using black grease paint, I

streaked my face, neck, hands, chest, and costume so that I matched the greasy mechanic description of Ferris in the script. I applied the black after powdering so that it would continue to smear throughout the night's performance rather than remaining stable.

The effect the make-up had on me was nominal. It was the final ingredient needed for the Ferris Layman character. The age lines put me in contact with the cloud of fatigue that surrounded Ferris that he was constantly fighting to dispel. The beard, dark with white splotches, completely altered the appearance of my face and simplified my belief in my character's existence.

The visual effect was designed to make the audience believe I was a good man who was still boyish and careless in his grooming habits, and fun to be around. Despite his guilt and fatigue, Ferris was good company.

The physical appearance of a character, obtained through the use of costume and make-up, is profoundly important to an actor's work. Is it more important than the inner work an actor does? Niki Juncker responded to this question.

I think, again, that depends on the actor. To do their inner work, they have to project it, somewhat in a visual way, because I think movement is very important to a character... the whole of the actor, what he says, how he says it, and how he looks all contribute to the characterization.

The inner work and the physical transformation of actor to character is the only way Ferris Layman could live, breathe, and walk across Lindenwood's Mainstage. This actor strove, as all others must strive, to do everything he could to forge the author's dream into a living, human soul, different from any other.

The actor's journey is a long and arduous one, one that requires a deep understanding of the character and a willingness to undergo a complete transformation. It is a process that is both physically and mentally demanding, one that requires a great deal of discipline and dedication.

For the actor, the character is not just a role to be played, but a person to be lived. It is a process of discovery, one that requires the actor to delve deep into the character's psyche and to uncover the secrets of their soul. It is a process that is both challenging and rewarding, one that allows the actor to explore the depths of the human experience.

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Chapter Four

A Rehearsal/Performance Journal

Sept. 3

Tonight was our first read-through. Jesse, our director, talked about his ideas for the show, we viewed the model of the set, and we discussed accents. I am glad he does not want to attempt a country accent. I could not stand to listen to poorly done accents for two acts. Most people think there is only one way to talk if a person is from the country, and it is invariably a crucifixion of a Southern dialect. Our play is set in Indiana.

I like the script. It is well-constructed. As for my role, Ferris is a deep fellow, with a long history and a tragic past. He is a single parent, a hard worker, and a man who believes only in what he can touch. Ferris is sensitive to those around him.

Ferris is a good man who believes in doing things correctly. He is not necessarily a good father, as he has allowed his love for his son to blind him to some of his son's needs. This will be a difficult role.

Sept. 4

First rehearsal on our feet, and I got to know the rest of the cast a little better. It is a good mix of transfer students, first year students, Lindenwood veterans, and graduate students. Jesse Bean is one graduate student, and I am the other.

The rehearsal was awkward, but what first blocking rehearsal is not? Jesse seemed relaxed, and his opening speech was a good one. We got the blocking for Act I, a rehearsal schedule, and

a good idea of what Jesse expects from us. He gave us physical acting areas on the stage for each scene, but the detailed business between characters is up to the actors.

There were no major problems tonight, except that Jesse told us to go with any feelings we might have. He meant that we should feel free to move however we liked. I did not feel anything, as I did not know the play well enough to do anything but stare at my blocking and my lines in the script.

Sept. 5

We blocked Act II tonight. Last night, because Act I is longer than Act II, we went home after the initial blocking was done. Tonight we had to run Act II again. I am not in the second act as much as I am in the first, but there is a difficult confrontation with Showers in Act II.

The cast is growing accustomed to one another and is beginning to have more fun. I have yet to find my niche. I am the oldest person in the show, director included, and have also been at Lindenwood the longest, except for James Freund. I do not want to be a symbol of authority. I want to be included in the group, but I have a feeling that this will not happen.

Tonight's rehearsal ran much more smoothly for me as I am now getting used to the taped outline of the set. This is going to be an exercise in environmental response, as practically nothing from the set suggests the real background. Not only must we act our characters, we must also conjure our world for the audience as well. Intense focus will be required during rehearsals.

Sept. 6

We ran the whole show tonight. It was better than I thought the run would be. I made a few mistakes with my blocking, but they were easily corrected.

I began memorizing today. The cumulative effect was that I was able to look at the faces of the other actors.

My character loses his temper a few times in this show. He does spoil Bud somewhat, but he does draw the line on Bud's behavior when Ferris feels the boy is going too far. Bud has to be afraid of him and at the same time love him. Jennie Mae has become Bud's mother, basically, so I have to think about that. Would he love his daughter as his daughter, and at the same time have her remind him of his late wife? Does he ever think about taking Jennie Mae in his arms now that she is only one year younger than Sarah was when Ferris wed her? Does he feel the sting of temptation?

Asking questions adds depth to a character. Why does Ferris not drink? Even though Indiana is governed by dry laws, liquor is available. Ferris chooses not to drink. Is it because of his temper or because of what he might do if his inhibitions were removed? How do I feel about Showers, an older man attracted to my young daughter? Ferris makes the good choices in his behavior, but a character must be more than a good man. People have the choice of good or evil and reasons for choosing either one.

Sept. 9

Tonight was our first night off book for Act I. I did well which was a surprise. The scene that troubled me was where Buddy

is terrified of the storm and I attempt to calm him. I also had trouble on my long speech about love, life, and Sarah.

I made some definite progress in the area of toning down my accent. I am trying to move away from the stereotypical drawl. I decided that if I play each line with the character's objectives in mind, the line will sound correct. I believe that actors who ask, "Does this sound right?" are focusing on the wrong part of the puzzle. If played correct, it will sound correct.

My goal tonight was communication. Another goal was to enjoy myself at every rehearsal. Actors who are miserable offstage because of their actions onstage should think of pursuing another career. An actor must enjoy himself because audiences will notice his lack of enthusiasm. If the actor enjoys himself, the audience will enjoy his performance.

Rehearsal was over earlier than I thought it would be. Jesse gave a preview of rehearsals to come. He gave me a few character notes to think about, particularly in the area of why I have such a volatile temper. One reason for the temper could be that Buddy's problems absorb all of my patience.

Sept. 10

Tonight we worked through Act II, with many stops to work on problems. A stop/go rehearsal is one of the most grueling aspects of any rehearsal process. After working the act we ran it once to see if we had retained what we had learned. Jesse was more concerned with scenes I was not in and I was released early.

Ferris does not appear to be a confrontational person. He meets most situations head-on, and he has a fiery temper; however,

Bud's psychotic aversion to water is something from which Ferris shies away. Unfortunately for Ferris, Basil and Showers force him to confront the problem.

Bud's screaming is reminiscent of the day he almost drowned. Bud's cries make Ferris relive the day his wife died. In the thirteen years since Sarah's death, Ferris has not recovered from the loss.

Sept. 11

Tonight we had a work rehearsal for Act I. I made a discovery and worked towards a new goal. The discovery was why Ferris hired Showers when the man had no experience in auto repair. Ferris has had to work all of his life, first to support his young wife, then his wife and new family. His workload increased, as did his responsibilities, when Sarah died. Ferris says, "Little hard work'll take care of most things, I guess" (Leonard 84). Ferris replaced Sarah with hard work, leaving a vacuum in the care of his son. Showers and Buddy developed an immediate friendship. Ferris decided to hire Showers so he could help in the garage and watch Buddy.

My goal for tonight, set by the director, was to tone down my attitude towards Bud. It is important that the audience not think of Ferris as mean. I need to develop a clear set of signals that let Bud know when I am serious. Jesse said, "When the master rolls up the newspaper, the dog knows he did something wrong." Some of my lines need to be underplayed without any lessening of the intrinsic force behind them.

Sept. 12

Jesse only wanted to work certain scenes from Act II. I was only in the one confrontation scene with Showers. It is the most important dramatic moment for Ferris, as losing the fight with Showers precipitates Buddy's death. Not only must I lose, but I must lose a certain way. I have not decided which way I am going to lose yet.

Jesse suggested that Ferris says more with expressions and gestures than he does with his mouth. Jesse wants me to underplay the fight with Showers, the way I underplay my anger with Buddy in Act I. Ferris has a hot temper, but he rarely raises his voice.

I had a character conference with Jesse, and we are on the same track concerning Ferris. He likes what I am doing, but he cautioned me about lack of projection during my speech about Sarah in the night scene. He wants that scene to be as real as possible without sacrificing volume.

I have given thought to the question of why Ferris chooses good over evil. Ferris was lost in grief after the death of his wife, who was a devoted church-goer. Ferris had only been with her for five years when God took her. Ferris focused his anger at God, and in a burst of rage fueled by alcohol, burned down Zion's only church. Afraid of losing his temper and hurting his children, he abstained from alcohol. When Ferris met Showers, an unemployed preacher, Ferris gave him a job so that Showers would not be tempted to preach again. Ferris used Showers to replace Sarah's caring for Buddy, but by allowing the preacher

to live in his home, Ferris set in motion events that would lead to Buddy's death.

Jesse said, "Don't choke on the bones of the skeletons in your closet." I told him that I was only exercising my imagination.

Sept. 13

We had a full run-through. We are required to be off-book Monday, but Jesse had us run the entire play so we could get a feel for it. "We've torn this thing apart," he told us, "now we want to put it back together and see what she looks like," he told us.

For this early a stage we are in good shape. I had a line problem in Goldie's cafeteria, but when I got offstage I realized that it was because Showers had jumped one of my lines. Goldie gave me my cue, Showers gave Goldie one of her cues, she responded back, Showers mumbled something, I picked up the scene as best I could, and we moved on. Diane (Goldie) stopped the scene and insisted we go back, which I objected to. Jesse had said at the start, "...keep going tonight. Get a feel of the flow. Don't stop unless your head falls off. If it does, we'll stop and you can pick it up, but try to keep going." Jesse said not to go back, for which I was thankful.

I was better at underplaying temper, especially with Bud, and my projection was much better on my Sarah speech. Bryan Reeder producer of the play, came tonight to observe. He told me I was doing a fine job.

When Showers and I first met and talked about cars, Jesse wanted us to capture the spirit of men in a bar telling stories. I was better at that tonight, but it needs more work.

We lost concentration in Act II tonight, causing some people to miss entrances. I decided that my favorite scenes are the ones I share with Basil. Basil is my opposite in the play, favoring dirt and bicycles to machinery and oil. We genuinely like each other and depend on one another.

Sept. 16

Our first night offbook for Act II, and I spent most of it in the greenroom while Jesse worked on scenes that he thought were problematic. None of my scenes were included, so I used the time to study my lines.

I have begun paraphrasing excessively, a problem propagated by the informality of the dialogue. The first scene went badly, as Showers could not keep up with Buddy and me. Joey called for a line when there was silence, but it was usually someone else's line.

The second scene was better. I removed the front tire from the bicycle and replaced it during the scene for the first time. The confrontation between Ferris and Showers was better tonight. I only froze for a second, and I covered the lapse with facial expressions indicating the character's thoughts. It was the actor, not the character, thinking madly, so I must focus on solving my line problems. I underplayed my anger and resisted the urge to shout and explode. Jesse seemed pleased.

The attempted Buddy bathing, without scripts in hand, showed

improvement. I discovered that Buddy's screams disturb Ferris so because they are the sounds he made the day he almost drowned and Sarah died. I have to drown in that past trauma, become distracted, and allow Buddy to escape.

I have chosen at which point the past catches catastrophically up with me, now I must decide exactly which emotions I will experience and choose all of the illustrating actions, and develop a logical, believable progression into that emotional state and back out of it. There must be some limit to the pain because it was decided that I have to remove the tub of water at the end of the scene. My pain can't be so distracting that stopping to pick up the tub would seem illogical.

Sept. 18

I was sick last night and missed rehearsal. Tonight we worked selected scenes from Act I and then ran the act. Jesse thought it was a good rehearsal, but that the show still has ups and downs. He wants us to concentrate on developing a flowing quality to the action.

Jesse seemed pleased with our progress. I feel left out occasionally because Jesse is concentrating on the less experienced performers. All of us need to concentrate on slowing down our speeches and on clarifying our articulation.

I did a good job of keeping my personal life out of rehearsal tonight. I was angry when I got to the theatre, cold, and hungry. I was able to concentrate past these distractions. I feel a measure of pride.

Sept. 19

We ran through both acts. My warm-up beforehand was more intense than usual because the theatre's temperature was extremely cold. Jesse was in a grand mood and was entertaining to observe, making a nice counterpoint to my own mood which has been rather dark this week.

All of the cast still needs to study lines and work business. The three scenes where Buddy becomes highly agitated onstage are troubling me. I feel lost, treading water until I hear a cue. Showers is part of the problem because he does not know his lines well. The lack of control in these three scenes fills me with a sense of impending danger.

My work has improved. I am smoothing out the inconsistencies of my performance, eliminating the peaks and troughs of quality that Jesse had warned me about.

The fight with Showers tonight felt stilted. He faded on his lines, as all actors will do, so I continued with my lines and dragged us through the scene. Mistakes are what make rehearsals fun.

Buddy hit me in the mouth and nose during the bathing scene. While there was no real damage, it was a painful surprise. I covered the shock and pain by burying my face in Jennie Mae's shoulder. Actually, since I am extremely upset at that point, crying on her shoulder might be a good idea. I must ask Jesse.

Sept. 23

We worked Act I scenes and then began a run at 8:00. I performed well. I felt comfortable and began to experiment more.

It was the most exhilarating DIVINERS rehearsal yet.

Jesse asked me to make a noise on my first entrance to let Buddy know I was there. I stepped out, cleared my throat, and spit. Jesse liked it so much that he was prompted to tell me he loved me. I worked more on non-verbal sounds tonight, sounds that all people make; burps, grunts, wheezes, sniffings, and so on.

I altered the pace at which I deliver certain lines tonight, particularly in the night scene, because I feel that Ferris is the most vulnerable in that scene.

The improvisation exercise before rehearsal began made the night feel natural and real. The improvisation began with Dewey and Melvin onstage, and anyone in the cast could enter the exercise at any point. It was fun, funny, lunatic, and fantastic. We tried to divine some liquor, because of the dry laws, we argued about the salvation of our souls, and extrapolated on the relationships that are hinted at in the script.

Sept. 24

We had a work rehearsal for Act II. Jesse stopped most scenes after every few lines to work problems. We ran out of time and were not able to run the act afterwards, and I hope we can all retain what we learned. Act I is in much better shape than Act II.

Tonight's improvisation exercise was not as successful as last night's. The topic became sex early on. I tried vainly to change the subject because I did not believe our characters would talk openly amongst themselves about sex. Instead, Basil, Buddy and I started a separate improvisation away from the others.

Basil and I taught Bud how to start a fight and how to defend himself once the fight started. My favorite part of the improvisation was teaching Bud how to exercise for increased muscular capacity.

There was trouble tonight because Showers needs to study his lines. During the fight I bulled through my lines whether he gave me the correct response or not. In a way, it was helpful because I did in fact become angry with Showers. By the end of the scene I had chills all over my body.

There were serious problems with the bathing scene. Jesse stopped us because it looked dangerously out of control. We began again after working out the struggling sequence. I heard my cue to drop Joey and fled to Jennie Mae, only this time I did not embrace her. Jesse told me he preferred that I embrace her as I had done last night because it says many things about Ferris. One, that Ferris is extremely upset; two, the pain Ferris feels at reliving Sarah's death drives him to his last living reminder of her, Jennie Mae.

I was surprised to find myself the mediator of a dispute between Jesse and Showers. Showers claimed he couldn't hear his cue after Buddy exits, so I suggested that I give Showers a visual cue, breaking the embrace with Jennie Mae. Jesse agreed to that, which relaxed me. Jesse had been growing increasingly impatient with Showers.

I was barely able to get the bicycle tire back on the bicycle tonight. I asked the assistant Stage Manager to remove all of

the washers because the washers interfere with the nuts. The washers were still on, so I had to fumble with them, throwing Basil's rhythm off. Jesse said he thought the scene was off tonight.

Sept. 25

We warmed up, skipped the improvisational exercise because Paul Butts was here to take pictures for the lobby display, and started a run-through of Act I.

I made a couple of new discoveries about my character. I have decided that I prefer Act I to Act II because the scenes are more enjoyable, offering me the opportunity to discover new emotions every night. Act I provides different playing levels, such as love, comradery, fear, sorrow, anxiety, happiness, and anger.

One of my discoveries concerned Ferris' sleeping habits. Ferris becomes cantankerous when someone disturbs his rest. The only time I raise my voice at Buddy during the whole play is when he wakes me up in the middle of the night. Ferris also has a finer sense of humor than I had first thought. He becomes more playful every night.

I actually blanked out on my second from last line in the bicycle scene. I said a generic, "Yep," stood there for a blink of eternity, then remembered, "Looks to be a real nice day."

Jesse let us go after one run, and we were out of rehearsal by 8:00. I was surprised at being finished so early, but in a nice way.

Sept. 26

Jesse told us that if our first run of Act II tonight was of quality performance level, we could leave early again. That was not the case. Problems arose, prompting Jesse to chide us about what an abysmal abomination he had just witnessed.

Concentration was lacking. Showers and Buddy came out half a page before their cue during the bicycle scene in this act. I was also guilty of not concentrating. After the bathing scene in Act II, when I run and hug Jennie Mae, I smashed my nose into her shoulder. There were line problems between Showers and I during the fight. I said a line out of sequence and got lost. Showers was unsure of how to respond, as was I, so we glared at each other and grunted occasionally. Finally, I said the last line of the argument so we could move on.

Jesse felt better about the second run. Problems still existed, maddenly enough in the same areas. In the previous run, Showers and Buddy had come out too soon in the bicycle scene. This time, we gave them their cue and nothing happened. I am glad Basil and I had gravitated to each other during the improvisation exercises because we knew and trusted each other. We sat down, continued to work on the tire, he suggested we roll the tire again, and we watched it roll. I bounced the tire as if to check the air pressure. We began a discussion about which was best, cars or bicycles. After almost two minutes, Showers and Buddy finally joined us. Buddy and Showers seemed perturbed by the incident, but Basil and I seemed to find it humorous. As long as the same thing does not happen during a performance, I will continue to laugh at the incident.

Sept. 27

We ran the entire show.

"Rehearse your backstage routine." Jesse has said that repeatedly. I must admit some resentment on my part. I get the impression that my director considers acting a mystical process of becoming another person, a theory that I do not adhere to. I choose to put myself in the situation, have the author's prescribed reaction, and motivate the actions from a part of my personality that would cause me to react in that particular manner. Rather than devoting my energies into a transformation of personality, I concentrate on making my actions logical and believable.

My backstage routine is simple: costumes, make-up, warm-up, check props, and wait for the show to begin. I do not pace, or put myself in a trance in order to become my character. My style is different.

The actual rehearsal was fantastic. It was exhilarating and tight. Everything fell into place and gave me the feeling that we had finally achieved something. Jesse actually applauded us before beginning notes. Bryan Reeder was present tonight and he circulated amongst us, doling out compliments. Jesse and Bryan enjoyed the show immensely.

Goldie slaps me harder every night in the diner scene. I decided tonight that Ferris truly enjoys fighting with her every morning. Unfortunately, in this scene, she mentions Sarah.

I included Showers more in the night scene as I talk about Sarah. I hovered near him at the beginning, drifted away, and then snapped back at the end of the monologue.

I can not describe what a pleasure this rehearsal was. I am glad it happened. This will make going into technical rehearsals much easier.

Sept. 29

Today was a joke. The crew was not ready at ten in the morning for our scheduled cue-to-cue. We waited a half hour for them to prepare. We told jokes to pass the time, but the big joke came when we began the rehearsal. The crew was not ready for a dry tech, one without actors, much less the wet tech, one with actors, that we were having today. We wasted two hours. I sang songs with Basil backstage. It passed the time.

Sept. 30

This was our first dress rehearsal, complete with lights and sound. The first problem came when I discovered that everyone had a costume except me. All I had was a pair of boots and an undershirt. The next problem was that sound levels had not been set. The final problem was that the lights had not been gelled yet.

The acting was low on energy. I myself was tired, but part of my lethargy may have been psychological. I am tired of rehearsing. I want an audience. An actor can never be ready enough, but my patience is dying.

I have been thinking about Ferris and his relationship with Zion. Both have become stagnate. Ferris is happy the way he is because the townspeople respect Ferris enough not to mention Sarah's death or Buddy's behavior. Ferris sees Showers as a

blessing at first, not realizing that Showers will only stir the stagnate waters of Ferris's life.

Ferris fails, but he is not a weak man. He avoids the screams of Buddy because his wife's death is the one thing that causes Ferris true pain. Ferris realizes that continued avoidance will cost his son's health, so he chooses to face his fears. Ferris crumbles under pressure, allowing Buddy to escape to the dangerous river and death. Ferris tries is all one can say.

Oct. 1

The first day of October brings me a sense of accomplishment. The rehearsal process is nearly complete.

I had two costumes instead of none tonight. My coveralls make me feel like Elvis Presley, but complete costume and make-up help solidify the character for the actor. My walk and movements, basic physical characterization, have evolved to a satisfying point. My tone of voice and emotions behind my words are set.

My personal energy was low, but the run went exceptionally well. Jesse gave no significant notes. I am much happier with the attempted bathing of Bud in Act II. I added some nonverbal sounds and throw-away lines, and these help me build to the breaking point.

Oct. 2

I was so ready for the last rehearsal I thought that death would claim me. I have tired of rehearsing and crave an audience. Theatre is incomplete without spectators.

I have actions, emotions, logical transitions, and desire. I hope to find my techniques have provided me with a stage picture that is complete save for talent, which I also hope I have.

I noticed tonight that Ferris is similar to Buddy in that both react to the thought of getting wet with powerful emotions. Ferris reacts to the screams of his son. Ferris wants to avoid getting his son wet so he won't scream, and Buddy wants to avoid getting wet so he won't die. Ferris has more self-control than Buddy, and is able to overcome his fears and take action against Buddy's mental illness.

Oct. 3

The audience seemed to like my character on this premiere performance night. They laughed often and I held their attention when I was the center of attention. I felt I gave a good performance.

The good thing about this cast is that no one tries to steal focus when another character is having a moment. I am glad, otherwise a show of this style would have become a disaster. There were no problems tonight as no one broke character or went up on their lines. We enjoyed our opening night.

Jesse introduced us to a new backstage tradition. He likes to have the company join hands and yell profanity. He claims it relieves tension. While I felt this was untrue, the yelling added to the fun of the evening.

Oct. 4

Tonight I discovered through imagination where Ferris got his mechanical training. He was a mechanic for the army during World War I. He met his wife while he was serving and brought her back to Zion with him.

The audience was slightly larger and more responsive tonight. Everyone in the cast had family and friends in the house. I had three friends come on opening night, and two attended this performance.



I had one vocal stumble, but I covered it and made it look natural. I was going on and on about Hoover when I realized that I had skipped a line. I stopped, went back, picked it up, and went on. I almost failed to make my costume change as well. I could not locate my second costume because I thought I had left it downstairs in the dressing room. I had preset it backstage and had then forgotten I had done so. I was frantic for a few seconds until I realized what I had done. I suppose I was more than a little nervous because Bob Wilcox, a local theatre critic, would be here tonight.

Oct. 5

The house was crowded, alive, responsive, and excellent to perform for. Harry Weber, another local theatre critic, was planning on attending, but he failed to arrive. A positive review would have meant more sales for next week, but at least the suburban journals are carrying an article about us.

I have noticed that Ferris is sleepy much of the play, but I have decided to rule out alcohol as the cause. I believe it is because he rises early every day, works hard in his garage, and takes care of errands at home. His social life is non-existent as work consumes all of his time. I think that Ferris's disgruntled state when Buddy wakes him up, and Showers' soreness after working with Ferris support this supposition.

Oct. 9

A brush-up rehearsal is usually a rapid run-through without costumes or sound, or lights, and that is the rehearsal the cast expected to have tonight. Such was not the case. Jesse and some members of the cast wanted to videotape the rehearsal. Also, Jesse called Paul Butts to do a photo session of the



play, so we were expected to don complete make-up and costumes. I decided to make the most of the situation, so I timed myself when I did my make-up and got into my costume. It took me nine minutes to go from my regular clothes to the completed image of my character. I wear age make-up in this show, but not to a great extent as my beard covers most of my face.

The photo call was painless because Paul Butts has a professional's attitude and ability. The rehearsal, however, may have done more harm than good. Hardly anyone treated the rehearsal seriously. Part of the reason behind the levity was that some cast members saw a full run brush-up rehearsal as an unneeded annoyance. Consequently, the cast broke character, missed cues, and lost focus in general.

Jimmy Freund rationalized the sum of the rehearsal: "This was our only night to go crazy and have fun. I'm going for it." Actors can be amazing creatures.

Oct. 10

The audience was quiet and reserved at first, but as the evening progressed, they loosened up. After the first couple of scenes, they realized that laughter was acceptable.

The show's pace seemed slower than usual. As I expected, the rehearsal last night has adversely affected the cast. Goldie is afraid to look at me during the diner scene because she is afraid we will start laughing at each other again. I am afraid as well.

The only thing worse than breaking character in a scene is having to eat a doughnut that has ants crawling all over it.

From the time Goldie gave me the doughnut up until I was supposed to bite it, I was clearing ants away from the section I wanted to eat. I succeeded, but almost at the cost of a missed cue. There were two seconds of silence before I realized it was my line. I hope I managed to clear the ants away completely.

Oct. 11

The audience tonight was the largest and most responsive one we have had. Jim Leonard, Jr, the author, was not present tonight. I spoke with him earlier in the week and invited him to attend, but he declined because he was busy trying to get another of his plays into production at another theatre. He wished the cast best wishes and asked me about our production. He also solicited my opinion about the quality of his work, and I told him I had enjoyed my contact with his writing. I told him I had wanted his written opinion about my interpretation of Ferris, and he apologized for being unable to comply with my wishes. Speaking with the author of a play I was performing was a strange experience.

I had problems with members of the audience tonight. During my Sarah speech in Act I, some girls in the balcony were giggling. It was an intrusion on my concentration. Someone also took a flash photograph during the last scene. This is not only distracting, it is also against the law.

Oct. 13

Closing night. This is the final entry in this rehearsal and performance journal. I have tried to pay attention to my

thoughts during the actual rehearsal process and performances, not an any in-depth analysis, which was done in earlier chapters.

Tonight's house broke our previous attendance record for this play. The audience was extremely responsive, causing me to feel alive onstage. The audience seemed to be enraptured of the cast. My character was immediately well-received. Everyone in the cast had a real sense of teamwork.

For our warm-up tonight, Jen Jonassen brought her video camera. All the cast members tried to outdo one another to see who could be the zaniest for the camera. It was an effective warm-up.

The doughnut was without ants tonight. My only problem in the show came during the fight with Showers. I skipped one line, but Showers covered for me and we were able to finish the fight effectively.

During the applause at the curtain call, I realized that the run was really over. This had been a very relaxed rehearsal process for me. Once I determined the idea of the play, it was easy to see how my character contributed to the writer's superobjective. I riddled my performance with small touches, which added subtext to the lines. Consciously, many audience members may have missed the smaller details, but subconsciously these details will make the audience think.

I believe The Diviners works on many levels. I believe my interpretation of Ferris Layman was successful. I leave this production with a satisfying sense of accomplishment.

Chapter Five

Post Mortem: An End View

Rodney Whatley solicited opinions from Lindenwood faculty, students, and the public about his performance in The Diviners by Jim Leonard, Jr. This chapter consists of the opinions that came in answer to his solicitation.

The Director

This is a discussion of Rodney Whatley's performance of Ferris Layman as written by Jesse Bean. The discussion is written in two sections; the first concerns the rehearsal period, and the second concerns the actual performances.

To rehearse one must be in shape and in tune. Rodney was prompt in his arrival to the rehearsal space and he made an effort to serve as a leader in the warm-up process as well. During the rehearsal I found Rodney to be inventive. Rodney made consistent attempts to bring new ideas about his character to the stage and experiment with them. He was an independent worker. I could give him a note and he would be on his way. It was refreshing to work with an actor that was so self-motivated.

Rodney's performances were also consistent. Each night Rodney kept the play fresh for himself and that paid off. Even in times of trouble, he was able to pull off a scene. I remember one night before the scene in Goldie's diner, the preset props broke. The scene began, the actress in charge of the props, coffee cups and food, had nothing to give to Rodney. He did not waver; instead, he kept on with the scene by pantomiming the props.

My favorite scene of Rodney's was between Ferris and Basil. The scene consisted of two middle-aged men discussing the virtues of automobiles, good-looking men, and machinery. The scene was as cool and relaxed as the river in Zion.

Working with Rodney was a positive experience. It was refreshing to "direct" and not "teach" someone how to "act". Rodney already has that skill.

The Scene Designer-- Donnell Walsh

Rodney Whatley's canny portrayal of Ferris Layman in Lindenwood College's fall opener, The Diviners, was a fine exercise in character nuance and subtlety. Mr. Whatley seemed to carefully avoid the stereotypical rural manners which could have easily trivialized the reality of Ferris whenever he appeared in the course of the production.

Here was a man in all his physical and emotional aspects, roaring one minute at some off-color humor and moved to tenderness at the mere thought of his dead wife. This Ferris had a kind of easy-going familiarity; he seemed to be a composite of bits and pieces of several country people I have encountered and spoken with. Here also was a man who was living life fully every day and willing to share all of his interactions with it in the unfolding of each scene in which he was a part. As his role developed, I came to appreciate a well-crafted personality whose invectives and reactions were always a deft touch to the many moments of an excellent production. Mr. Whatley also aged an additional 10 years and managed to maintain the poise of the middle-aged Ferris with seamless virtuosity.

Bob Wilcox -- Critic, Riverfront Times

Middle-age is the most difficult period for young actors to play. Old age brings major differences in the way people stand, move and talk -- changes that a young performer can latch on to in order to build a convincing characterization. But the changes in middle-age are more subtle, more difficult to observe, more difficult to embody. They are more difficult to remember to continue to embody consistently throughout a performance.

In The Diviners, Ferris Layman is the father of two teenage children and is probably somewhere in early middle-age -- around forty. Rodney Whatley, playing Ferris in the Lindenwood College production of the play, established a basic physical style in both body and voice that were appropriate for this man. He was helped in communicating the age of Ferris by also reflecting the influence of his occupation, that of a mechanic, a man who works with his hands.

An actor must expend a tremendous amount of energy just staying focused on his performance, and at moments Whatley's youth broke through the character he created. Perhaps, in fact, he might have taken that creation a little farther away from himself initially; he might then not have been as likely to slip away from it.

Whatley's focus held beautifully when he was listening to another actor, a crucial attribute of a convincing performance. He grew in his role through the evening, settling into it comfortably.

I admired both Whatley's control and his intensity when Ferris cut loose in anger with C.C. Showers and then pulled back to make

peace. This was, overall, a well-conceived and well-executed performance, and a commendable extension of the range of work I have seen Whatley do.

All comments appear in this chapter completely unedited.

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Appendix A

Niki Juncker Interview

Costume Design: The Diviners

The following interview took place in the afternoon of Feb. 3, 1992. "R" is the symbol of Rodney Whatley, and "N" is the symbol for Niki Juncker.

R: In your opinion, how important is costume to an actor?

N: Well, I don't think it is the most important thing, but I think it can help the audience. The actor is the most important thing. Some actors react differently to costumes. I mean, in the sense that it makes them feel more like the character. The audience, it helps them with visual identification.

R: Good, because that is the next question: is the costume more important for the actor or the audience?

N: I think that it depends on the actor; on how important the costume is to that actor, but for the audience I think that it is important. Even if they don't realize they are reacting to it, they are because audiences are extremely visually oriented.

R: Probably because the generation of television watchers are our audiences. Would you be comfortable working with an actor who ... if you were operating as both costumer and director, would an actor who did not get into the character until he got the costume make you comfortable or uncomfortable?

N: Well, as a director, an actor has to have more in him than what the costume says about him. I'd be kind of upset about an actor who couldn't act without the costume. As a costume de-

signer, I would probably feel the same way, actually. Of course, I did last year, operated as both, and I have seen actors who have done better when they put the costume on. I think that during the rehearsal process, moving to the point where we get costumes, if the actor is not showing something, then we are in trouble.

R: How much relevance do you place on the costume descriptions that are placed in the actual script?

N: You have to pay attention if it is in the dialogue. Because you have to have something that makes that statement or you have to change the line. In general, directors don't care to do that.

R: Sometimes a script will have a props list and a costumes list in the back.

N: No, I don't pay any attention to that at all. I strictly get my ideas from the script. I don't want to copy what someone else has done. And every director has a different point of view on his characters as well. What the director feels about his characters is more important than things at the back of the script.

R: Now, Ferris had two costumes. Why did you costume him in the manner that you did?

N: Well, the first major costume, the coverall, simply, the choices there, I wanted something that wasn't real bright, because that kind of denim was very common for mechanics in that time period. It was suitable for him. The second costume was derived from two things, the fact that he had to come out in that night scene, the coverall wasn't very practical for that scene. Plus, you had to have a little feeling that he didn't wear the coveralls all the time. That was his daytime uniform, though

he didn't wear it all the time.

R: Is the physical appearance of the character as important as the inner work the actor does?

N: I think, again, that depends on the actor. To do their inner work, they have to project it, somewhat in a visual way, because I think movement is very important to a character. Certainly in how the words come out makes a difference in what the actor does, so I would say that the acting with the words is the most important thing; the whole of the actor, what he says, how he says it, and how he looks all contribute to the characterization.

R: Is it possible for an actor to work with only one of the two elements, with costume or inner work?

N: I don't think it is really possible for an actor to work with only a costume, because even if they make no other preparation, getting into a costume makes them pull something out of themselves. I don't think you can separate, and we try to encourage people involved in the downstage not to rely heavily on costumes or elements of scenery, just those that are physically necessary because of the script. It helps to teach a young actor to rely primarily on themselves to create a role. Make-up will help, but you can't rely on that to do your work for you.

R: The director asked me to grow a beard for the character, but there was no beard in your renderings. Do you agree with the director's choice of Ferris having a beard?

N: I think the reason that the director wanted it, especially for the time period, made him look dirtier and messier. My own personal feeling is that, for that time period, the beard really made him apart as somewhat of an oddball. I'm not sure that is

what should have been said about him. He has an odd relationship with his son, but I don't see he himself as a rebel against society, except in that one thing that he can't say no to the kid because he has his own feelings of guilt about the whole situation. If I had been directing the show, I would not have assigned a beard to that character. I think if the director wants it, he should get it, because someone has to be in charge of this committee, right?

R: Ferris was about ten years older than myself. Did you feel that the make-up used created the illusion that I was ten years older?

N: I think it was fine, it was neither too much or too little. I made no particular note of it, which is good.

R: Do you believe using make-up to create the illusion of age in younger actors is vital in an educational environment such as Lindenwood College?

N: Yes, they need to learn to handle the different ways to change their faces. Learning to handle age make-up is a good way of learning how to handle make-up in general. It is also important in that it is a visual aid in whatever an actor is doing with an older character. I think that it is important for a young actor.

R: Do you feel the actor, Rodney Whatley, by his use of costume and make-up, successfully created the illusion of Ferris Layman?

N: Yes, I think so.

R: Is it true that hats were popular during the time period of the play?

N: Yes. Especially for formal situations.

R: There weren't many formal situations in The Diviners, yet

Ferris never wore a hat.

N: I believe the situations and the scenes he was in lent themselves to being without the use of a hat. There really was no purpose in using one. I gave Basil one, it helps with a young actor and age. The other thing is it kind of gives him a style. It was his style, he was the kind of older farmer who would wear a hat. I don't think a character like Ferris would wear one while he was working. He may use one when he goes to church, or into the big city, but under normal circumstances in and around his house or business, he would not have worn a hat.

R: Of course, there is also the fact that my thinning hair makes me look older.

N: One thing that is also true is that farmers wear them because they are sun protectors in the field. Whatever hat they choose to wear usually has some sort of brim, whether it is the bill in front like John Deere hats, or a cowboy hat, or a Fedora like I gave Basil.

R: Final question: Is there anything about the costume and make-up in the production that you would now like to change? Were you overall happy with the results?

N: I was happy with everything.

Goldie



Niki

The Diviners

Ferris

